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FROM THE WINGS BY B. H. BUXTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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By the same Author,

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FROM THE WINGS.

A NOVEL.

BY

B. H. BUXTON,

AUTHOR OF "JENNIE OF 'THE PRINCE'S,'" "NELL—ON AND
OFF THE STAGE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1881.

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TO
GEORGE BENTLEY, Esq.,
WHO WAS THE FIRST TO HELP AND ENCOURAGE ME
IN MY LITERARY CAREER,
THIS NOVEL IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

LONDON: *Oct.* 1880.

TO

GEORGE BENTLEY, ESQ.

AND HIS WIFE, THE LADY OF BENTLEY, AND FAMILIES

IN HIS HOUSE AT LONDON

THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 18TH 1800

BY

JOHN BENTLEY

LONDON

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MEMORANDUM

TO : THE PRESIDENT

FROM :

1. The following information was received from the
2. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D. C., on
3. January 10, 1941.
4. The Bureau of the Census has been advised
5. that the Census of 1940 is being conducted
6. on a basis of "one person, one vote."
7. This means that each person will be counted
8. only once, regardless of the number of
9. residences he or she may have.
10. This is a change from the present practice
11. of counting a person in each residence in which
12. he or she is counted.
13. The Bureau of the Census is now
14. preparing the necessary forms and instructions
15. for the conduct of the 1940 Census.
16. It is expected that the Census will be
17. completed by the end of the year.
18. The Bureau of the Census is also
19. preparing a report on the results of the
20. Census.

FROM THE WINGS.

CHAPTER I.

LOST.

For what I am—no hero, but a man
Still loving thee.

“MAURICE, I must find her! I must and will, if I spend my life in the search. I'll certainly never darken my father's doors again until I have succeeded. I have shaken the dust off my feet as far as home is concerned. As to my mother——”

Thus, wildly, passionately, speaks Harold Steele; and Maurice, his half-brother and senior by ten years, listens calmly, dispassionately. He is sorry for the “poor boy,” whose flushed face and excited gestures betray how terribly he feels the untoward blow which unkind Fate has so lately dealt him.

Yes; Maurice, steady, reserved, placable, regrets his brother's trouble; but it fills him with wonder, not with sympathy.

"Don't excite yourself, Hal," he says, after a minute's awkward hesitation. "If I am to help you, you must be calm, calm and reasonable, if possible. Tell me simply and concisely what has happened. What are the facts of the case? You return home, you say, and find Clare missing?"

"Gone! hurried out of the house; that girl, so young, so innocent, so beautiful, cast adrift upon the streets of London—Clare! who, as my mother knows, is my ideal; the woman it has been the dream of my life to marry—Clare, for aught we can tell, may at this moment—— O good God, I cannot bear to think of it!"

As he speaks, Harold springs to his feet.

"Maurice, I cannot sit idly here; I must start off at once to find her."

He rushes towards the door in his irrepressible desire to be moving—to do something that may further the object in view.

"Sit down, Hal, will you?" cries Maurice; and, to enforce the command, he takes his brother by the shoulders and pushes him back into a chair. "We shall have Kempton here in a moment to

inquire into the cause of this disturbance. Now be reasonable, old fellow; do try and inform me briefly of what has occurred. Remember I know absolutely nothing. I only returned to England last Wednesday, and have paid but one visit to Hyde Park Place since."

"And did you not miss Clare then?" cries Harold eagerly.

"I certainly did not see her," says Maurice; "but I very rarely do see her when I go home."

"And did you not ask for her?"

"No, I confess that I did not. I was only there for an hour, and we were at luncheon the greater part of that time."

Maurice looks and speaks with perfect tranquillity; and as his brother continues silent, he glances across at him dubiously. Harold has risen from his chair again; not impetuously this time, but very sadly. He moves over to his brother's side and stands there wringing his hands.

"Maurice, I am too wretched," he says. "*You* know how dearly I love her." His voice sounds husky, and tears force their way into his blue eyes.

"I knew you were very fond of her once, five

years ago, when you left England," says Maurice presently.

"There is no once in my dictionary," answers Harold decisively. "It is always and for all time with me. I have loved Clare since I was a boy of twelve. I shall love her as long as I live. My mother knew this, knew it when she turned my darling out of the house. And yet she had promised me, promised me faithfully, that Clare should always have a home beneath our roof. Oh, why did I believe, why did I trust her? Why did I not confide in you? You would have watched over Clare for me. She would have been safe with you, and now——"

Maurice Steele is aware by this time that a calm and coherent account of his troubles may not be expected from young Harold in his present mood. So the elder and wiser man places his hand gently on the lad's shoulder, and says in a kind tone:

"I'm very sorry for you, Hal; but I see no cause for despair. Clare is so remarkable a person that there can be little difficulty in tracking her. There are not many girls like her in England. The best thing for you to do is to return to Sheerness; you said you would have to go back

for a day or two, and when next you are in town, come and see me at this address. You will always hear of me, if you do not happen to find me there." So saying, Maurice slips a card into his brother's hand and moves towards the door; but, before he has reached it, he remembers to ask a question: "Has Clare no relatives?" he inquires dubiously.

"None," answers Harold, and shakes his head sadly. "Her father was porter at Torchester College when I was at school there, and when he died (that was just before I left Torchester), mother took Clare into our house to assist the girls in their fancy-work, and all that sort of thing. Clare works beautifully. She can do splendid artistic arrangements in wool and silk, and all the rest of it. They all agree that she is wonderfully clever with her needle. *I* think she is clever in every way. There never were such fingers for work."

Harold speaks with enthusiasm. While describing Clare's accomplishments he has for the moment forgotten his trouble.

"Now you have given me something like a clue at last, Hal," says Maurice, smiling. "No

doubt she is trying to earn her living by the sale of that fancy-work."

"But think of her, with her face, living alone," cries Harold, his momentary elation over.

"My dear Hal, it is not beauty but levity which makes it dangerous for a woman to live alone. From what I remember, Clare has both dignity and self-respect. I say from what I remember, for during the last three years I have been very little at home, as you have probably heard already."

Harold colours.

"Yes; I have heard something of a misunderstanding between you and the governor," he says. And after a moment's pause he adds: "Tell me all about it, old fellow. I like to hear both sides of the question, and listening to you makes me forget——"

Maurice perceives the ominous contraction of his step-brother's brow, and fearing a fresh outburst of futile indignation, rushes to the rescue—verbally.

"When I left the house in Threadneedle Street, and threw up my chances of becoming a millionaire, I accepted this appointment of tutor to Lord Kempton, with whom I have been travelling

for the last two years. Now that he is of age I am going back to Cambridge to coach. All through the summer, from June to September, I shall be with a reading-party in Devonshire. After that relaxation I shall settle down in the bosom of Alma Mater, so you see I shall be within hail if you *really* want me for anything."

The stress upon the adverb is involuntary. Maurice by this time feels very sorry for his chivalrous, tender-hearted, hot-headed young half-brother, who has such a vast capacity for feeling love and anger.

But the elder man is preoccupied by his own affairs. He is ambitious, and has his way to make in the world. His time is fully occupied, and leisure a luxury he can ill afford. He mentally deprecates the notion of lending himself to repetitions of such scenes as the present. If he can help the boy, he will. If Clare is to be found, he will find her. There cannot be much difficulty about that. But if, after reasonable search and inquiry, the girl does not reappear, why then Master Hal must resign himself to do what so many men have done before him: he must forget her; he must get over his love and

his sorrow as best he can. The chances are that the girl herself has no desire to be found.

Such is Maurice's mental summing-up of the case laid before him; but he is far too kind-hearted to put these adverse opinions into words. Harold had been eyeing his brother curiously for some time, and both were silent. At last, however, the younger man rises, and, extending his hand, says:

"Now I'm really off, Maurice, and I thank you for your patience. You do not sneer at me as *she* did; but all the time I know you are calling me 'Fool' in your own mind."

"Indeed, no," replies Maurice promptly. "I respect constancy wherever I meet it, although I admit that I was not prepared for this exhibition of the virtue. I am quite sure that neither your mother nor our father have the slightest idea that you will take this matter so much to heart, so don't be too bitter——"

"I am not bitter against him," interrupts Harold hotly. "It is with her that I am furious. She knew that I loved Clare. She promised me, when I went to sea, that my darling should always remain with us, and I in return promised

not to write to my betrothed. I have kept my word faithfully. How has my mother kept hers?"

He looks as if he feels inclined to be revenged on his faithless parent at the instant. His fist is clenched, and his whole expression dangerously threatening.

"You shall not leave me like this, Hal," says his brother, again detaining him. "You are too unreasonable. Remember that you were but fifteen when you went to sea. You are now twenty. How many boys—I beg pardon—men of twenty are constant to the love of fifteen?"

"My mother knows me, she is quite aware of the state of my mind. I never wrote to her without mentioning Clare."

"That may be, but—ah well, I will say no more at present. I only wish I could be of some practical assistance to you. I am going up to Hyde Park Place presently. I really think you had better go with me. You might——"

"Never!" cries Harold passionately. "I will not re-enter that house until I find my Clare. I can go and see the governor at the office; but I shall not go home again. I shall put up with Sumner in Duke Street."

Maurice wisely abstains from urging a matter which is so evidently distasteful, and the brothers part. The younger starts for Sheerness, where he has some packing to do; the elder to pay a visit to the paternal mansion in Hyde Park Place.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECT.

Who loves you, loses in that love
All power to love another.

JAMES STEELE, the father of Maurice and Harold, began life as clerk in a stockbroker's office in Liverpool. In this office he rose with astonishing rapidity. The why and wherefore of his speedy promotion was an enigma to his fellow-clerks. They grumbled, but they did not comprehend. Conjecture was rife; but it was always vague until fresh impetus was given to it by the announcement that James Steele had been elected junior partner of the firm.

Then it was said that Mr. Forman, his chief, was stupid, slow, and over-scrupulous; and that his ambitious, clever, and enterprising clerk, who had "no conscience," contrived to establish the dominant influence over his senior which antipodean natures occasionally exercise over one another. Whatever the cause was mattered but

little to James, since the result was eminently satisfactory.

He, who began life without a penny, came up to London at the age of eight-and-thirty to start in business for himself as a wealthy man. And he continued to prosper.

Money begets money. To his thousands other thousands came easily, rapidly. Very soon James Steele was spoken of as one of the richest men in the city which is "paved with gold."

During the days of his youth and poverty he had married a simple Scotch maiden, who died the following year in giving birth to Maurice. For some time after the death of his "bonnie wee wife," James remained a widower, and contrived to find oblivion and consolation for the loss of the amiable partner of his poverty, in his new striving after wealth.

But by the time he came to London, Mr. Steele began to feel the want of a mistress for his now extensive establishment, and cast about for a suitable partner to aid him in the regulation of his household, and the entertainment of friends from the City.

The object of his present choice was the anti-

thesis of that pure simple-minded Scotch lassie, whom he had married for love, and love only.

Miss Amalia Schwalbach was a tall, dark, enterprising lady—a quondam Camberwell belle of Hebro-Germanic origin. She brought her husband a handsome dower; she painted her cheeks and her lips; her bold black eyes were wont to flash with irrepressible anger on the least provocation, and her strident voice echoed with repellent harshness through hall, parlour, and nursery from morning until night.

Such a woman would have been a terrible stepmother for a girl; but to Maurice her presence in the house of his father made little difference. The boy was at school at the time of his father's second marriage, and during the holidays he saw very little of his gorgeous stepmother. Her presence added nothing to his comfort, so, boy-like, he took good care to keep out of her way.

As years passed on they drifted farther and farther apart. He was absorbed in his studies and his sports; she, in repairing the ravages of relentless Time by increased attention to the decoration of her person. She was ambitious as well as vain, and strove with a zeal worthy a better object to push her way into society.

Boy as he was, Maurice thoroughly despised his father's wife—despised her almost too much to dislike her, since he considered her “beneath contempt.” He had much natural refinement, and was indeed a gentleman in taste, feeling, and appearance.

In no sense could Mrs. Steele be considered a lady. And, in this instance, contrary natures did not attract one another.

To his half-brother Harold, Maurice was warmly attached; but Mrs. Steele's daughters, Cecilia and Amalia, were as antipathetic to the lad as was their mother.

From the preparatory school at Brighton, where his first childhood was passed, Maurice was sent on to Rugby, where he carried off many a prize; and what was better even than these treasured awards, he there earned for himself an excellent name and reputation, and proved himself worthy of the good old motto he had elected to adopt in the first flush of his ingenuous youth: *Sans peur et sans reproche*.

Maurice inherited his father's abilities and his mother's disposition.

James Steele's first wife was the direct descendant of a long line of Puritans; and she her-

self possessed many of those sterling qualities which made the Puritans the backbone of the British nation. Her son inherited many of his young mother's characteristics. To the most indomitable energy and perseverance he added integrity and singleness of purpose.

Even as a boy he was respected as much as he was liked. Brave fellows loved and honoured, cowards and sneaks detested him.

No one appreciated his good and lovable qualities better than his half-brother Harold, who was his junior by some ten years, and who, from his infancy, had looked up to Maurice with the unconscious veneration ingenuous youth bestows upon one who appears a happy combination of hero and saint.

Maurice returned the boy's affection cordially and sincerely. The fact of Harold's startling dissimilarity to his sisters endeared him specially to his half-brother.

The girls, Cecilia and Amalia, resembled their vulgar noisy mother in looks and manner. They were both dark, large, loud, self-asserting. Their bold black eyes rolled defiantly, their bushy eyebrows were wont to contract with ill-temper. Their coarse dark hair was rolled and curled and

twisted into whatever incongruous masses fashion might choose to dictate; their unmusical voices were not heard to advantage in the domestic circle, and became unendurable to Maurice when he was invited to listen to "drawing-room ditties," or to still more distressing imitations of French and English heroines of *opéra bouffe*.

To his sisters young Harold certainly presented a remarkable contrast, morally and physically.

His complexion was ruddy, like his father's; he had flaxen hair and bright blue eyes, the only blue eyes in the family. But it was Harold's frank eager look, his broad well-knit frame, his ringing laugh, his happy disposition, which so completely differed from "the rest of the Steeles."

He was his mother's darling.

The father petted little Amalia, the youngest daughter—who, by reason of her youth, was less objectionable than Cecilia; but Maurice, his dear dead Maggie's son, was James Steele's joy and pride.

Maurice had the brains of the family, and the head of the house believed in "brains."

"Maurice shall be my partner. Maurice shall keep up the business and the name. Maurice shall inherit and double my wealth."

Thus said the successful speculator to his intimate friends. And one of them, who considered Mr. Steele's ridiculous affection for that eldest boy of his a sign of weakness unworthy so great a financier, took upon himself to interfere in the course of the lad's education.

"If you really intend him to enter your business, why send him to Cambridge?" asked Mr. Smythe, with covert remonstrance in his tone and expression.

"Because I believe in 'all-round men,'" was the prompt reply. "I should have done better myself if I had been more of a scholar. I've lived long enough to find that out. I've taught myself to be a bit of a politician, and I think I have kept pace with the times fairly well. I value the position a man of the world can command, and I think myself a cut above the mere money-grubber, I can tell you. My son shall have the benefit of my experience, besides the advantages which wealth can give him, and which I fully appreciate though I never enjoyed."

For all reply to this "romantic" declaration of paternal sentiment Mr. Smythe contented himself by shrugging his shoulders and muttering, "Fool!"

But he reminded James Steele of that mono-

syllabic reply four years later, when that gentleman, wearing a rueful expression of countenance, confided to him that Maurice absolutely declined to have anything whatever to do with the business.

"What the devil do you think my own son told me, Smythe?" demanded the infuriated father.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Smythe, with that aggravating movement of his shoulders. He was a very old "chum" of Steele's, and knew most of his affairs, both private and commercial.

"That smooth-faced lad actually had the insolence to tell me that what we City men call financing and speculation seemed to him like gambling and dishonesty. 'I cannot hold one code of honour for one time and place, and practise the reverse of it in another,' says my lord, his chin in the air, and both anger and pride in his face. By Jove, Smythe, I felt just then as if he were a cut above the rest of us," continued the father of Maurice, divided between indignation and admiration.

"Tut, tut," answered Smythe, who was neither sentimental nor romantic in the least degree. "The boy is an idiot, and has been pampered

out of all knowledge of right and wrong. Had his majesty any further remarks to make on our mode of transacting our business?"

"Yes," replied James, who spoke as though he were repeating a difficult lesson. "Yes; he declared that any transaction which would not be considered fair and above-board in private life was, to his thinking, equally dishonourable in matters of business. Then he quoted certain cases, which he said went to prove his proposition that stockbrokers as a rule are neither more nor less than advanced swindlers. And this he said to me, Smythe—to *me!*"

"And what did you say?" asked the imperturbable friend.

"I said I would allow him a hundred a year, and that he might come to his senses or starve upon that," continued the disappointed father, striving to revive the flame of his fast-dying fury.

"And his high and mighty lordship replied——?" asked Smythe, sneering.

"Ah, this is the most amazing part of the story," answered Steele. "Maurice said he considered the allowance a liberal one under the circumstances, and that with it and what he could

make by his pen he should be very comfortable. He was quite serious, I assure you. Now what do you think of that?"

"Think!" exclaimed Smythe, abandoning his tone of cool indifference for the first time, "I think that he is an impertinent coxcomb, and I am heartily glad I have no sons to preach any nonsense about honour to me."

This difference of opinion between Maurice and his father occurred when the former left Cambridge, where he had earned distinction by his classical and historical attainments. He was also acknowledged as a mathematician. In fact he had become essentially what his father had wished him to be—"an all-round man," of genial manners and cultivated mind. Maurice was neither prig nor pedant, but an accomplished gentleman.

A year before his elder brother left Cambridge, Harold quitted the *Britannia*. In all his letters to his sailor-brother Maurice never referred to the misunderstanding between their father and himself; but Mrs. Steele, among whose virtues reticence was conspicuous by its absence, wrote a long and garbled account of the terrific quarrel to her darling Hal.

This "amended version" made very little im-

pression on the young sailor's mind. There never had been much cordiality between the boy and his father; and in any difficulty between the two, Harold would have taken the part of his brother against his parent. And this without a moment's hesitation, for Hal's nature was absolutely loyal and constant, as his every thought and action proved. And from all time he had preferred Maurice to "papa." The only thought which troubled the younger about the elder brother, was that he had not taken the latter into his confidence in the matter of his betrothal to Clare. But he had feared Maurice's ridicule.

At fifteen a lad does fear ridicule, and Maurice was not of a sentimental turn of mind. He would probably have laughed at the idea of his young brother considering himself engaged to Clare Redmond, the daughter of the late porter at Torchester College, the girl who had been taken into Mrs. Steele's service, received "out of pure charity," as that lady termed the fact that Clare was expected to do all the needlework required by the family.

Clare found that charity very cold; but since it afforded her the shelter of a roof for her homeless head, and secured her the vicinity and

frequent companionship of Harold, the girl, who was proud and reticent, resolved to bear the ills of the present for the sake of a glad independence in—the future.

Clare was no mere needlewoman. She was an artist who could design and create as well as any pupil at the South Kensington School for needlework. And her services in Mrs. Steele's establishment would have been poorly repaid by sixty instead of sixteen pounds a year. She designed Mrs. Steele's and "the young ladies'" dresses. She embroidered fine linen for their personal adornment, and she worked such covers and antimacassars for the various unwieldy pieces of furniture in the house that their ungainly forms were hidden, and thus made comely to the beholder's eye.

But Clare did not work thus assiduously for the love of her mistress or for the sake of her wages. Another motive swayed her. Ever since they were ten and eleven had she and Harold Steele considered themselves engaged.

Their childish, but none the less earnest, vows had been plighted in the old ivy-covered porch of Torchester Church; and for three happy years they had met almost daily as long as term-time

lasted. Clare was the confidante of all Hal's griefs and joys. What he read he brought her to read; the lessons taught to him he most conscientiously endeavoured to impart to her, in all which laudable efforts he was ably seconded by a crotchety old tutor who boarded with the Redmonds, took a great fancy to intelligent "Miss Clare," and helped her to carry out the scheme of education which Harold, poor lad, thought desirable for his wife-elect, and which she—more than a child in feeling—was as anxious as any loving woman to carry out "for his sake."

Shortly after Harold left Torchester, Clare's father died, leaving the poor child without a single relative.

The crotchety old schoolmaster offered to adopt and keep the pretty child as his own; but Harold resolutely opposed this philanthropic scheme, and put the case so plausibly to Mrs. Steele, that that far-seeing lady agreed to receive Clare herself.

"And a very good bargain I've made, my dear," said Mrs. Steele to her husband, when she had satisfied herself of the talent of her young *protégée's* attainments. "I have pleased Hal, done a charitable action, and saved no end

of money in the way of dressmaker's bills. The girl certainly does get through a surprising amount of work. Her father apprenticed her to a milliner, it appears."

James Steele always liked to hear of "a good bargain," and soon began to look very kindly upon the tall handsome girl with the marvellous dark eyes, who often passed him in the hall or on the stairs.

He had no suspicion that his second son intended to marry this young person some day.

To his mother, who idolised him, Harold had foolishly confided his love.

"You will take care of Clare for me, won't you, dear mother?" he said, the night before he sailed for the Pacific.

"Of course I will, my boy," said Mrs. Steele with a reassuring smile.

Harold did not approve of her flippant tone.

"But I mean real care, mother," he urged, and his heart was in his eyes; "such care as you give Cissy and Amy. Don't let her walk in Kensington Gardens alone, or go errands for you in town. She is too handsome for that. And oh, mother dear, be kind to her for my sake; she is going to be my wife some day, you know."

"Oh, very well, my darling," said the mother, unable to look serious as she heard this astounding announcement. "You'll marry when you are an admiral, no doubt."

"Long before that, mother. As soon as I'm twenty-one I shall marry Clare. I shall have my pay and the two hundred a year which my godfather left me; we can live upon that."

He was barely sixteen—a mere child, of course; but there was such resolution in his face and tone that his mother was alarmed.

"All shall be as you please, my darling boy," she said, laughing to hide her uneasiness. "I only make one condition." She was speaking seriously now, and her face hardened suddenly. "You must give me your word—you must faithfully promise me—not to write to Clare. Then I, in my turn, will undertake to look after her."

"Oh mother, don't make such a hard condition," the boy entreated. But his mother was obdurate; and after some thought and anxious hesitation, the lad gave her the promise she demanded. "All right, mother, I know you think it's for the best," he said, "and I feel my darling will be safe in your keeping."

Mrs. Steele bowed her head in assent, and the compact was sealed with a kiss.

* * * * *

The parting between the young lovers was brief and very sad.

"You will not change or forget me, my Clare?" said Harold.

"How can I ever forget you, Hal?" she answered, sobbing. "Whom have I to love in all the wide world—but you?"

"I must not write to you, darling," cried Harold. "I have promised mother that I will not. She thinks it best so, and she will take care of you for me. What difference can letters make when we know and love and trust one another—so well?"

Clare bowed her lovely head. He had agreed, and so must she. He slipped a ring upon the third finger of her left hand.

"Wear that always for my sake," he cried.

And she, reading the two words written in enamel upon the broad gold band, answered:

"For ever!"

* * * * *

The next morning was the one fixed for Harold's departure.

“Remember, mother, remember — for my sake.”

This was his last whisper, as he was clasped in his fond parent's arms.

She was not a lady, and she had many faults, but she loved her son passionately; and as she held him in her close embrace, and heard him so impressively bid her “Remember for his sake:” “Of course, my darling, yes—yes!” she cried, her utterance choked by tears. But she had not the slightest idea to what that earnest injunction of his referred. It recurred to her afterwards, and she smiled compassionately as she thought what a romantic impressionable creature her Harold was. “He will have fallen in love a dozen times before he returns.”

Thus she concluded her reflections, and felt vastly consoled by the conviction that her son would prove as destitute of faith as she herself was.

Never, night or day, did that little ring quit Clare's finger.

Mrs. Steele was not slow to perceive Clare's pale face and altered demeanour after Harold's departure, and she mentally resolved that the

promise her son had extracted from her should not be kept.

Nursing vague thoughts of treachery in her bosom soon engendered positive hatred for the innocent object of it. And this feeling was increased as the passing weeks and months developed the early promise of Clare's beauty, making the slight graceful child into a lovely woman.

How to rid herself of this incubus, this unconscious rival of Cecilia's, this detested "flame" of Harold's, became an engrossing thought to Harold's scheming mother. The matter required careful deliberation. Palpable injustice would bring about furious resentment on the part of that impulsive sailor-lad. Of course the whole affair was mere child's-play, and with another boy would have been dismissed with the contempt of ridicule. But Harold was so resolute, so steadfast, so straightforward, so quick to detect falsehood, that his mother feared him. And she had seen that, for the moment at least, his love for Clare, however childish, was all-absorbing and sincere. Could she contrive to find some grave fault with the girl? Could she dismiss her on some pretext of duty unfulfilled, of carelessness or inattention? No; that was not possible, since

Clare toiled and slaved from morning until night, and never neglected any one of her multifarious and complicated duties.

"I will struggle on for his sake," was the girl's oft-repeated mental resolution.

"She does it all to baffle me," declared Mrs. Steele, and determined not to be foiled.

The wish is father to the deed. We are supposed to be governed by circumstances, whereas, with a moderately strong will, we mostly contrive to mould them to our purpose.

"Circumstances" at length occurred which enabled Mrs. Steele to carry out her purpose with an apparent show of justice on her side.

CHAPTER III.

MAURICE.

How dwarfed against his manliness
We see the poor pretension—
The wants, the aims, the follies, born
Of fashion and convention.

“My dear Maurice, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure!” exclaims Mrs. Steele, as her stepson, whom she fears as much as she admires, enters the boudoir (Mrs. Steele is nothing if not fashionable) in Hyde Park Place. “I was just saying to Cissy—wasn’t I, Cissy dear?—that I so much wished you would call to-day. And where is that dear Lord Kempton?”

“Lord Kempton is lunching with his cousins.”

“Oh dear, how I wish you had brought him with you!” exclaims Cecilia, speaking with the peculiar nasal drawl which so plainly betokens her origin. “He is the most fascinating being I ever had the good fortune to meet.”

Maurice vouchsafes no reply to this gratuitous rhapsody on the part of his sister. Turning to-

wards her mother he says significantly: "So Harold is back?"

Mrs. Steele blushes, and the colour, which with her betrays confusion, resembles the peony rather than the rose.

"What, have you seen him already?" she exclaims eagerly. "I wonder if he has been treating you to such a ridiculous scene as he favoured me with?"

She attempts a laugh; but her uneasiness is beyond any conventional mask.

"I did not find him either ridiculous or amusing," says Maurice quietly. "He was thoroughly upset, anxious, and excited."

"And all about that affected, stuck-up, good-for-nothing girl!" cries Cecilia, forgetting her usual drawl in her over-mastering indignation.

"Be quiet, Cissy!" says Mrs. Steele hurriedly.

There is a look upon Maurice's grave face at this moment, which fills her with dismay. She has learnt to dread the scathing criticisms which it has been her lot to endure from this resolute and most Quixotic stepson of hers on previous occasions. Vulgar and commonplace as the woman is, she possesses a certain amount of shrewdness, a quality of which Cecilia is absolutely de-

ficient. And, to give the mother her due, she is always ready, as is the cackling hen, to protect any one of her chickens. So now she prepares herself to receive the enemy's shot in person, and thus to save her child from the fierce fire of scorn and ridicule.

"Don't mind Cissy, Maurice," she says soothingly. "She does not know what she is talking about. Listen to me. I am sure you will believe that I am dreadfully grieved that Hal should have made this scene the very day of his return home. You must know how anxious I have been to have him back again after all these long years."

Her eyes fill with tears as she speaks, and the harshness of her voice is lost in its momentarily tender vibration.

Maurice knows that in her way she does love his brother, and that she has felt anxious during his absence, and is no doubt much grieved by his present conduct; but Hal is not entirely to blame for that.

"What Hal says is, that you have broken a promise you made him, mother. It is that which has so completely upset him, poor lad."

"This is altogether too absurd!" exclaims the mother, forgetting tears and tenderness in her

fast-rising wrath. "As if I could keep a girl in my service who has turned out most abominably, just because Hal fancied himself in love with her when he was a small schoolboy."

"But did Clare turn out most abominably?" asks Maurice, with a peculiar emphasis on the words he quotes.

"Indeed she did; you need not sneer at mamma's expression, Maurice; no words could be too strong where Clare's audacity is to be described."

It is Cecilia who, regardless of her mother's warning frowns, makes this declaration on her own account.

"I command you to be silent, my child," says Mrs. Steele severely. "This is not a subject of which you can have the slightest experience, I am proud to say that my daughters, thanks to their mother, are good and innocent girls, Maurice; and there are certain subjects which—h'm!"

"Let there be an end to this farce, mother," says Maurice sternly. "If you do not think Cecilia's presence desirable, send her out of the room; but do not let us waste any further time in futile discussion. Tell me all about Clare—all, please—and as briefly as possible."

Cecilia makes no attempt to carry out her half-brother's suggestion, which she mentally votes most insulting; but seats herself a little nearer to her mother, and looks towards her as though impatiently awaiting the commencement of a most interesting recital.

"Let me tell you first of all, Maurice," says Mrs. Steele, making a laudable effort to speak calmly, "that Clare Redmond is a proud, conceited, self-willed girl. Jackson says she never would associate with her or any of the other servants. Isn't that——?"

"Very natural, I should say," Maurice suggests promptly, "since she certainly had nothing in common with them. She was a very well-educated girl, and quite an artist in her way."

"Her way indeed!" remonstrates Mrs. Steele. "She was the most conceited creature that ever breathed; and as for her looks——"

"But this is straying from the subject in question," says Maurice quietly. His tone and the look he gives his step-mother produce an instantaneous effect.

She "pulls herself together" and resumes her narrative in a more direct fashion.

"Our Cissy came out eighteen months ago.

Lord Verstrume met her at her first ball, was evidently very much taken with her, and from that hour commenced to pay her the most—the most—desperate attentions.”

Mrs. Steele looks for confirmation to her daughter, and Cissy purses up her lips and wags her head impressively, as one who fails to find words adequate to the situation.

Maurice glances from one to the other, and covers his mouth with his hand to conceal an irrepressible smile. His mother construes his perfect silence into attention, and resumes her story.

“Lord Verstrume came here day after day, and sat here hour after hour. He really is a charming man. Do you know him, Maurice?”

“I have met him.”

“Don’t you think him very fascinating? So clever, so witty, and entertaining?” interrupts Cecilia, unable to keep silent any longer.

“Indeed I do not,” replies Maurice briefly. “To all decent men he must appear what he is—a leering old satyr!”

“I am sure you completely misunderstand the dear lord,” said Mrs. Steele loftily. “He certainly always made himself most agreeable to us, and

we never had a fault to find with him, until that bold girl tried to entrap him with her artful wiles. She began all of a sudden to take a wonderful interest in little Amy's health; said the poor dear child looked pale, and required fresh air and exercise. I—who am always easily touched where any one of my darlings is concerned—fell into that designing creature's trap without a moment's hesitation. She proposed to take Amalia for a walk in Kensington Gardens every morning, and I—in my innocence—thanked her and consented. Now, what do you think of that?"

"So far I fail to see anything very reprehensible," says Maurice.

He is beginning to feel horribly wearied by the harsh clatter of Mrs. Steele's tongue.

"Ah! that is because you do not know all yet," says that lady impressively.

"I wish to heaven you would make haste and inform me," he replies, with an impatient sigh.

"Those walks in Kensington Gardens soon became part of Clare's daily duties, until Amy—poor little Amy—put me on my guard. 'Mamma,' said my innocent lamb, 'whenever we sit down to rest in the Gardens, Lord Verstrume is sure to come up to us, and he sits down by Clare's side

and talks to her in whispers all the time. And Clare gets so red and seems so uncomfortable. And one day I looked round just after we had left home and I saw Lord Verstrume following us. I told Clare, and she was so cross with me for looking back. I never knew her so cross before, and really I had done no harm, had I?' 'No, indeed, my blessed innocent,' I said, kissing her watchful eyes. 'Now be sure you tell me every time Lord Verstrume talks to Clare anywhere; but don't you say a word about him to her, or let her know what I have bid you.'"

Maurice glances curiously at his step-mother. She is too engrossed in her recital now to notice him at all.

"That Amy is the sharpest little pet you ever saw. She watched Clare like a private detective, and one day she noticed his lordship took hold of Clare's hand!"

"*Mirabile dictu!* and Clare?" asks Maurice.

"She jumped up, flushing awfully. I suppose she saw the child watching her, and from that day she had the impertinence to refuse to go into the Gardens at all. No doubt she had led his lordship on far enough to suit her own purposes. I confess I scolded her well for her obstinacy,

and then milady said she would walk anywhere but in the Gardens with my child. I do loathe and detest hypocrisy. We all have faults; but give me frankness, and I'll forgive the rest. From that day Clare began to make herself perfectly odious, and Amy told me many other things I thoroughly disapproved of."

"I think little Amalia might have been better employed than in playing the spy, for her own sake," observes Maurice coldly.

It is Mrs. Steele's turn to look discomfited now.

"I must confess," she says, "that association with Clare may have made my baby somewhat precocious and worldly. Indeed, it was chiefly on the child's account that I was so anxious to get rid of Miss Clare; but just then—matters came to a—crisis. One day Lord Verstrume had been for a long time with Cecilia in the boudoir, so long that I thought——"

"Never mind about me now, mamma," cries Cissy angrily. "Tell Maurice about Clare, how she——"

"I will tell Maurice just what I saw, my dear," says Mrs. Steele eagerly. "He cannot doubt what my own eyes witnessed." Maurice inclines his

head. "Hearing footsteps in the passage, and expecting to see Lord Verstrume, I opened the door very softly, and there—just opposite to me, on the threshold of the morning-room, which Clare used as a workroom—I saw Lord Verstrume with his arms round the girl's waist——"

"How very revolting!" exclaims Maurice.

"You are quite right; it was revolting," answers Mrs. Steele. She is grateful to her stepson for having helped her to a word; for her "confusion of epitaphs" is marvellous at times. "That bad girl," she continues, "not content with having behaved so outrageously, actually added hypocrisy to her offence; for no sooner did she see me than she began to struggle and cry 'Help!'"

"Pretending she did not like it," sneered Cecilia.

"Quite possible she did not," retorts Maurice sharply. "The mere touch of that old wretch must have appeared like pollution to a right-minded girl."

Cecilia blushes furiously; perhaps with the recollection of what had happened in the boudoir that same afternoon.

"Did you never meet Lord Verstrume at the

Fermanaghs, Maurice?" asks Mrs. Steele, anxious to create a diversion.

"Never," says he, "nor in any other respectable house. His chief resort is the Kaleidoscope Theatre, I believe."

"But he is surely considered very fascinating by most people in society?" suggests Cecilia, who, having recovered her momentary *embarras*, is determined not to be put down any further.

"What sort of society?" queries Maurice. "Fifth-rate burlesque actresses, or disreputable ballet-girls, eh?" He has spoken with a sneer on his lips; but now he suddenly changes his tone, and adds, with serious entreaty, "Let me beg of you, Cissy, not to go about proclaiming your friendship for anyone so disreputable as old Lord Verstrume. Men of his stamp and of his tastes have done more to cast an odium on the stage, and those who belong to it, than all the Puritan influences in England."

This declaration silences Cecilia, and discomfits Mrs. Steele also. Maurice is so frightfully severe at times! To conciliate him she now observes:

"We certainly labour under a terrible disadvantage—your sister and I—since we have no

young men in the house to tell us what's what; whom to eat—I mean whom to meet—and whom to avoid. Your papa really is worse than nobody; always shut up in the City; and if he——”

“What was the upshot of the scene in the passage, mother?” asks Maurice sharply. He dreads the introduction of any fresh grievance into this protracted discourse. “Did you go to the girl's rescue, and order that wicked old nobleman to leave your house?”

Mrs. Steele hesitates.

“I really did not know what to do, Maurice. The girl evidently whispered to him that they were observed, for he disappeared like a flash of lightning. After a time I sent for Clare, and gave her a piece of my mind. I told her she had disgraced my house; that Lord Verstrume would not be likely to come and see any of us again after what had occurred, and that, of course, she could no longer remain under one roof with my daughters, but that I would try to get her into some penitentiary.”

“You told her that?” cries Maurice.

“Yes, and she was most insolent. She said that she hated Lord Verstrume, and that it was

my duty—my duty!—to protect her against annoyance, and not to insult her when she met with it. What more she said I will not trouble you with; it was all dictated by the same insolent spirit; and when I offered to write to Sister Barbara, who is at the head of the Home in South Kensington, she flatly declined to enter a reformatory, even if the heads of it should be willing to receive her. Then I fairly lost my temper, and gave her warning, telling her I thought a week's notice should be sufficient for her to find another situation for herself, since she declined the generous interference I had so kindly offered her. That night, while we were at the theatre, milady calmly takes herself off, without saying good-bye to anyone. Jackson told me she had not seen her the whole evening, and supposed she was sulking in her bedroom. But, when we went up to look for her, we found she had gone. Of course it was my duty—my painful duty—to examine all the cupboards and drawers, but nothing of ours was missing. She had only taken a small hand-bag and her workbox. She had even left most of her clothes behind her. No doubt she knew that where she was going she would find silks and satins, which would be more

to her taste than the simple gowns I made her wear in my service."

"And you have neither seen nor heard anything of her from that day to this?" asks Maurice. He speaks anxiously now.

"Nothing!" says Mrs. Steele coldly. "I suppose the wretched girl fancies I shall pursue her and have her locked up."

"That is nonsense," says Maurice hotly. "You cannot shut a girl up for being kissed." Then, glancing curiously at Cecilia, he adds: "I am ready to admit that the woman who allows Lord Verstrume to kiss her deserves to be placed in solitary confinement for the rest of her days."

"Ah, there is the gong!" exclaims Mrs. Steele, who feels truly grateful for this diversion. "You will stay to luncheon, Maurice?" she adds, regardless of her daughter's displeased frown.

Cissy's momentary annoyance is far less to be feared than Maurice's severe and disinterested anger. He, who is so handsome, so clever, so generally admired, knows some of the most influential members of the "*élite* of society" (Mrs. Steele's pet phrase, and always delivered with unction); he will stay away, if she gives him cause for annoyance, as he has done on previous

occasions; and while he is in town, Mrs. Steele certainly desires to bask in the sunshine of his presence, and glean from it the reflected light which throws a halo about his aristocratic patrons. These are the causes which conspire to make her invitation to luncheon more pressing than usual.

"Thanks," he says, rising and taking up his hat, "I have no time to spare to-day; every hour is already disposed of. My term of tutorship expires to-morrow, and I have to pack up. Then we dine early to-night; for Kempton wishes me to go to some theatre with him."

"You are not going to be a tutor any more, I hope?" queries Cecilia, who, taking example by her mother, has hastily resolved to prove the great interest she feels in Maurice's plans.

Maurice smiles. He certainly does look very handsome when he smiles.

"I shall probably be a tutor, and a tutor only, for the rest of my days," he says. "In June I go westward with a reading-party; and in October I return to Cambridge. I shall be glad to divide my attention a little more. The care and responsibility of looking after so precious a lordling as the eldest son of the Earl of Fermanagh has

been almost too much for me at times." Then, with a sudden change of manner, "Good-bye," he says, and with much impressiveness adds, "I sincerely hope you see nothing more of Lord Verstrume?"

"He has called twice," says Mrs. Steele uneasily; "but everything is changed between us. That terrible scene put an end to our hopes. I feel convinced that, but for that wicked girl, his lordship would have proposed to our Cissy."

Maurice laughs.

"You have reason to be grateful to that 'wicked girl' after all, then," says he, and moves towards the door. But Mrs. Steele detains him.

"You must not leave me like this, Maurice," she entreats with genuine emotion. "Tell me, what shall I do about Hal? He swears he will never rest until he finds Clare, and that he will not return home until he has found her. He must be mad. Did you ever hear of such folly?"

"Yes; I have heard of something like it; people will fall in love, you know, mother, especially at his age. In the spring—that is, at the age of twenty—the young man's fancy—Cissy will tell you the rest."

"But this is the wildest infatuation!" cries

Mrs. Steele. "He has not set eyes on Clare for five years. They only played together as children. His is blind love indeed!"

"You must not brand an affection as untrustworthy because it seems blind," says Maurice quietly. "Blind passion is sometimes stronger than open-eyed reason."

"But, Maurice, dear Maurice, do at least promise me to persuade my poor misguided boy to give up this senseless pursuit. He must not spend all his precious time in hunting a shifty will-o'-the-wisp."

"You might as well expect me to stop a raging flood, mother. Resign yourself to letting him have his way. You cannot prevent him indeed."

"Oh, Maurice," cries Mrs. Steele, sobbing now, and burying her face in her hands, "you are encouraging my boy—you are taking his part against his loving and devoted mother."

"I admit that I can feel for and with him."

"Then you think I am to blame?"

She asks this question after some hesitation, and she uncovers her tear-dimmed eyes that she may watch the steady resolute face, which at times is so hard to read.

"I do think you have been very much to blame," he says truthfully.

"And you will help my boy to find this disreputable girl, and—and—to marry her?" sobs the unhappy woman, who, for the moment, really feels crushed and humiliated. "I suppose you have forgotten that such a *miss*-alliance would break my heart, Maurice?"

"Do not distress yourself unnecessarily, mother. I do not wish Hal to marry Clare Redmond; nor should I further such a scheme. I certainly mean to seek the girl now for my own satisfaction. Your story has interested as much as it has pained me."

"I never knew you were romantic, Maurice," says Cecilia, happy to despatch at least one arrow on her own account.

"Neither did I," says Maurice coolly, "but I hope I am just."

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE KALEIDOSCOPE.

The old, old story.

Of light and shade,
Love, like the opal sender—
Like it, may be to vary—
May be to fade.

AFTER leaving the paternal residence Maurice betook himself to the office of a certain "Mr. Joseph Garbles, formerly of Scotland Yard."

Thus ran the legend engraved on a brass-plate which ornamented the outer door of one of the houses in Alpha Street, Strand.

Mr. Joseph Garbles, who was a philanthropist by inclination, and had been a detective by profession, now combined pleasure with business in the useful profession of—spy.

Not that he would have tolerated so opprobrious a denomination for a single instant. No; it was his pleasure and his pride to make secret investigations for the benefit—entirely for

the benefit—of his clients, *i.e.* of those who chose to employ him. He preferred cases requiring secrecy, accuracy, and despatch, and devoted himself to their investigation with a zeal and energy worthy of a better cause.

“A better cause?”—what cause could be better than the settling of private quarrels in a public court, the raking up of shameful family secrets, and the finding of audacious witnesses who bore testimony to acts which had never existed, save in their corrupt imaginations?

To the astute Mr. Garbles the speedy discovery of the missing girl “Clare” presented no difficulty whatever. “We shall find her, sir, find her and restore her to her friends—to you, sir” (with a knowing leer), “before the week is over. You may take my word on that, sir, and you will oblige me by the payment, in advance, of twenty-five pounds for current expenses. Those are our terms, sir, for preliminary inquiries, and when the matter is settled, and the lady is found, another twenty-five pounds. I don’t think you will find the man in London who’d take and do the business for you simpler nor more accommodative than that.”

Thus unctuously spoke Mr. Garbles; and Maurice, having listened attentively, and paused

to reflect, assented to the terms proposed. Fifty pounds was a considerable sum out of his scantily-supplied purse; but the relief he should be able to give to poor young Hal "before the week was over" was well worth that amount, and more too. Then Maurice remembered how shamefully his relatives had used the helpless girl who was dependent on them for shelter and bread, and his kind heart ached for the friendless orphan.

"I shall indeed be much relieved, be most thankful to you, Mr. Garbles," he said in his pleasantly candid way, "if you can find the missing lady for us. We have serious apprehensions on her account of course."

"That in course, sir," replied Mr. Garbles, and, with a wide grin on his evil face, he added, "I think you said, sir, as how the young party has very good looks?"

Maurice felt tempted to make a sharp retort; but remembering who the man was, and what his method of life, he wisely desisted. "I want to use, not abuse him," he reflected, and replied urbanely:

"It is Miss Redmond's remarkable beauty which will, I think, lessen the difficulty of discovering her. She is tall, and carries herself in a stately

manner. She has large dark eyes, and her complexion is that of a Spanish rather than an English girl; but she has golden-brown hair, light rather than dark, and mostly a high colour in her cheeks."

"The description certainly do sound uncommon fine," said Mr. Garbles; "but then, you see, sir, we always make allowances for the soffen'd feelings of them as is seeking missing friends."

"Never mind our feelings, man; find Miss Redmond for us," cried Maurice hastily. He was getting impatient again.

"And it's your opinion, sir, as this remarkable handsome young person is trying to earn a honest living by doing fancy needlework?" Mr. Garbles did not grin as he asked this question. He was beginning to feel some awe of this stern determined-looking visitor of his.

"I think it extremely probable that she would do so," said Maurice. "She is well-educated in every respect; but her chief accomplishment is the designing and carrying out of what people call artistic needlework."

Of this and all the other information vouchsafed by Mr. Steele, Joseph Garbles made ample notes in his ledger.

"I'll let you know, sir, as soon as we find ourselves on the track," he said, opening the office-door for his visitor.

* * * * *

"On the track," mused Maurice. Ah, no doubt this wily old detective would have no difficulty about the business he had undertaken so cheerfully. And Clare would be found. But where, how, with whom? "Whenever I find her I shall make her my wife!"

These words of Harold's, so resolutely spoken, rang in his brother's ears.

In the lad's present extravagant and wildly impetuous mood he would be ready—ay, eager—to marry Clare on the spot, if only he found her.

This conviction acted as a caution on Maurice, and made him resolve to be prudent rather than energetic in the matter of this vital discovery. Should Mr. Garbles find Clare, Maurice must certainly make it his business to inquire minutely into every detail of the life she had led after leaving Mrs. Steele's house, before he allowed rash young Harry to see his charmer again. For the girl herself Maurice felt the deepest pity, such pity as only good men can feel. As for his step-mother, the more clearly he understood the

villanous part that lady had played in this domestic drama, the greater became his horror and contempt for her.

In any case atonement must be made to that unfortunate and much-wronged girl; but Harold's interest was of still greater consequence to the anxious brother, and Harold must be watched over and preserved at all hazards.

Maurice was right when he said of himself that he was not romantic but just. He always tried to look at every side of a question before he even ventured to pronounce an opinion upon it at all. And this admirable caution saved him from the error of sentimental partisanship. Justice with him never hardened into severity, and mercy, therefore, was not likely to degenerate into morbid sentimentality.

* * * * *

"You will come to the Kaleidoscope to-night, won't you, Maurice?" says Lord Kempton, as he and his quondam tutor sit down together to their last *tête-à-tête* dinner. "I have taken stalls."

"Very well," says Maurice, indifferently. He does not much care about the Kaleidoscope burlesques. "I will go wherever you choose to

take me. But have you not seen 'Proserpine?' I thought you were there the other night."

The young fellow colours visibly.

"Ye-es, I was there," he says, with an abortive attempt at indifference; "but Harford would come away before it was all over, and I want to see it again."

For "it" Maurice mentally substitutes "her." And his suspicion is correct. He very soon discovers the object of his young friend's interest in a young lady who is attired in a wondrous combination of tarlatan and spangles, and whose onerous duties as maid-in-waiting to her Majesty Queen Proserpine are certainly no great tax upon her mental powers, since she is simply required to smile, dance, and stand at ease.

"Don't you think that girl in pink very pretty, Maurice?" whispers Lord Kempton, who has been gazing at the attendant sylph in anxious silence for some minutes past.

"No," says Maurice, in his decisive way.

"You cannot see the one I mean. Here, take my glasses. That one in pink near the wing."

Maurice looks again, and with more critical attention.

"Yes, she looks nice," he says presently; and after some hesitation he adds: "Much too nice to be here."

"That's just what she is. You've hit it straight this time, and no mistake, Maurice," answers Lord Kempton eagerly. "She truly is a dear good little girl."

"How in the world do you know anything about her?" asks Maurice, in a tone of annoyance.

He certainly does feel thoroughly, "put out." He has taken such exceeding pains, such endless precautions, to keep his young pupil from all dubious acquaintances and associates during the two years of his tutorship; and it does seem hard that within the last week of his guard the boy, profiting by Steele's temporary absence, has made an acquaintance which to the tutor seems most undesirable.

"Why did I let him go to the theatre with his cousin, and without me?" Maurice asks himself reproachfully; and, turning to his pupil, he inquires: "What do you know of this Miss Vivia Delane, pray?"

He has glanced at his programme, and reads the name off with angry derision.

"Her name is not Vivia at all; it is 'plain

Susie'—that's what she told me, you know; and I could not help saying it might be pretty Susie, but it could not be plain."

Lord Kempton repeats these, his first attempts at conversation "with an actress," as though they are the chronicles of some witty celebrity. He blushes and stammers the while, and looks just what he is—an overgrown schoolboy.

"But how came you to speak to her at all?" asks Maurice.

"Harford introduced me. He knows all the girls here. He went behind the scenes to speak to the manager; he asked me if I'd like to come too. Of course I said Yes. Oh, it is a queer place! Such winding passages, such queer steps up, and steps down, and such a general fuss and hurry and bother! Well, it was as much as I could do to follow my cousin. He is used to the place, and I was not. Turning round a corner—what someone called the prompt-wing—I came into collision with—with that young lady." (With the emphasis comes a fresh rush of colour into the lad's eager young face.) "I was afraid I had hurt her, and apologised, of course. Then Harford came up and introduced me. Presently the manager appeared; and while he and John

were talking together, I managed to get a little chat with Miss Delane. She is such a good girl—so gentle and so ladylike! quite different from all the rest, who were pushing, and laughing, and chattering, and screaming. For this was between the acts, and the curtain was down.”

“Well?” asks Maurice, anxious to know all that has to be told, and not blessing John Harford, who has been the cause of this disastrous meeting.

“Well, Maurice, don’t look cross,” says the young lord discontentedly. “I am sure you would have smiled and been as complimentary as possible if you had stood by that young lady’s side and listened to her pretty talk, as I did.”

“Possibly; but not having enjoyed that privilege, you must be my informant. Tell me what she said to you.”

“Oh, she told me all her story, poor child,” answers Lord Kempton, reassured by his tutor’s apparent interest. “Her mother was a dancing-mistress, and she herself learnt to dance as soon as she learnt to walk. In fact, she said she found dancing the easier of the two, unless she felt very sad; ‘then,’ she said, ‘she could only crawl.’ Oh, she is so amusing! She says the funniest things,

and she looks so demure all the time. I never met anyone like her before."

Maurice groans, but not audibly.

"Her mother is dead," resumes the young lord, believing his tutor to be deeply interested; "and Miss Delane lives with her grandmother and another girl—an actress too, I think. They have two rooms somewhere in Soho—'Not much of a place,' she told me; 'but though we're homely, we're happy; and enough is as good as a feast any day.'"

"Well, don't you be going to see her, Kempton," says Maurice, beginning to believe that no great harm has been done as yet; "you know how your family hate all that sort of thing."

"She is a very good girl," says Lord Kempton hotly, "and a good girl, be she a burlesque actress or a countess, is a fit acquaintance for anyone. The poor child must live, and to accomplish that necessity she has to earn her daily bread. She works hard enough for it, that's very certain; and it's a blessing she can dance breakdowns so well, and looks so pretty, or else she would—starve. Thirty-five shillings a week isn't a fortune; but it does keep the wolf from the door, as she says. She is on her promotion now. Six months ago

she was only in the ballet; but she hopes to get better parts in every piece now, as she has done fairly well in this one. That is her idea, poor child; but Harford says she will never be allowed to get on in this theatre because she is respectable, and so the others hate her; and she will not get what she deserves, as promotion is not the result of merit, but of favouritism, here. Therefore the well-behaved girls have no chance, unless they encourage old Hoaks himself, or the lardy-dardy idiots he chooses to consider as patrons. Patrons forsooth! they—the decent girls I mean—find all their attempts at getting on abortive, and are made to feel that the stage—this stage at least—is not the place in which to earn an honest livelihood. Is not this a scandalous state of things, Maurice? When I heard it all, and remembered that sweet child's truthful eyes and simple speech, my blood boiled, and I felt inclined to punch the manager's head. Great, fat, bloated, butcher-like beast he looked, as he stood in the wing, chucking one girl under the chin, patting another on the back, calling them all 'My dear' with disgusting familiarity. By Jove! if he had dared to lay a finger on poor little Susie, I'd have felled him like an ox, as he is—or rather a *Hoaks*."

Lord Kempton laughs boyishly as he delivers himself of his witticism(?). But suddenly he seizes the opera-glass again and concentrates his attention upon the stage. The curtain is up now.

"Ah, this is the last scene," he says. "Isn't it pretty? Does not Su—Miss Delane, I mean, look perfectly lovely in white? No one could doubt that she is a good girl. You can see it in her face, can't you, Maurice?"

This time Maurice does groan aloud; but the groan is changed into a conventional sigh of relief, as he rises from his stall and stretches his weary limbs. "Oh, these boys! these terrible boys!" he is thinking. "What am I to do with them? Harold frantic about lost Clare Redmond, and now Kempton raving about a dancer of breakdowns at the Kaleidoscope!"

CHAPTER V.

OVER A CIGAR.

Wisdom means a world of pain.

It is an exceptionally warm April evening. Myriads of stars gleam overhead; and to a casual passer-by the dim shadows of the cool Green Park suggest that a night spent within its iron gates would be no great hardship after all.

Ask those who have tried it, my friend!

The choice of a resting-place lies between the tantalising and decidedly hard upright of a square wooden bench, or the sodden level of grass on which the dews of night have fallen in copious showers.

Maurice looks into the Park as he is passing along westwards; but he is on the safe side in Piccadilly, and he glances through the high iron railings abstractedly as he paces along until he perceives that a figure, a tall female figure, is stealthily gliding over the grass within the Park, and that she evidently desires to keep on a level with him.

Presently the woman stops, and he mechanically stands still also. Then, from out the close folds of her clinging black shawl a hand is protruded, a long shapely white hand, and a voice says:

“In God’s name, help me—give me money for a night’s lodging! I have slept on a bench twice, and I feel so tired—so ill.”

Maurice thinks of Clare. The girl who has just addressed him speaks in the tone and with the accent of a lady. What can have brought her to this miserable pass?

It is not Clare; for this girl has bright fair hair. So much Maurice can distinguish even in the semi-darkness.

But it might have been.

And for Clare’s sake and Harold’s, Maurice gives the sweet-voiced suppliant half-a-sovereign.

“From my heart I thank you! God bless and keep you!” cries the girl, and she buries her face in her hands and sobs.

Maurice walks steadily on. Five minutes before he felt decidedly out of temper with himself and the rest of the world. This little incident had softened his mood, and the poor girl’s earnest

thanks echo in his mind and attune it to gentler thoughts.

He had been considerably annoyed by Lord Kempton's revelations at the Kaleidoscope, and the fact of his pupil's declining to accompany him home after the performance was over, did not serve to mitigate his displeasure.

"I promised Harford that I would look in at the Albany after the theatre, and stay and have a chat and smoke with him and some other fellows whom he has asked to meet me. I am sorry to leave you, Maurice; but a man must keep his engagements, you know."

This declaration was received in silence. Lord Kempton had evidently forgotten that it was his tutor's last night at home, and Maurice was too proud to remind him. With a hasty good-night they separated at the entrance to the Albany, and Maurice, secretly anathematising Harford, his theatrical proclivities and gossiping friends, made his way westwards.

Soon after that odd adventure with the fair-haired beggar, he arrived in Park Lane and opened the door of Hyde House with his latch-key.

His heart is heavy as he ascends the long

flights of stairs which lead up to his own particular "den."

All partings are more or less sad. And this is the last night he will spend under the roof which has afforded him such pleasant shelter during two years. True, he and his pupil have been absent from London a great deal; they have travelled, have seen strange countries, and interviewed many interesting foreigners. But all the time of their journeying they have never settled down. Moving was the order of the day then; rest was thought of as far distant, and only spoken of in connection with—home. And home to both has been synonymous with this particular house among the crowd of London houses. And now that they had returned to it, and realised its comforts and its luxuries once again, it is time for Maurice to bid it adieu for ever.

His present purpose is to remove to a modest apartment he has taken in King Street.

Lady Fermanagh, speaking for herself, as well as the earl her husband, has invited Mr. Steele to remain as a guest at Hyde House as long as he can arrange to do so, and Maurice knows the invitation to be as sincere as it is cordially spoken;

but he declines it. He has some literary work to complete, and just now particularly desires to be entirely unfettered, since he has volunteered to devote himself to some extent to his poor brother's all-absorbing business—the pursuit of Clare.

Maurice knows that any share in this Quixotic enterprise will sadly interfere with the pleasing task of composition he has so lately embarked upon. But Maurice has a kind heart, and his tenderest feelings have been aroused by the evident misery of his hot-headed young brother, and the profound compassion he himself feels for that hapless outcast—beautiful Clare. If only he could ascertain that she was housed and cared for, if his mind could be relieved by the knowledge that she was not destitute, not suffering and in absolute necessity, like that poor creature who had appealed to him just now; then he would be relieved of his keenest anxiety. But while he thought of her as possibly in want of bread—struggling, forlorn—he could take neither rest nor relaxation on his own account. So far the spirit of his brother had moved and dominated Maurice's calmer sensibilities, and the remembrance of the cruel treachery of Mrs. Steele and her malicious

daughter fired his indignation afresh whenever he thought of it.

Entering his den, Maurice approaches the widely-opened window, which in the daytime commands an extensive view of Hyde Park. He now looks sadly out into the still mystery of the dark spring night.

He is far above the line of sight of such belated pedestrians as are still wandering along Park Lane. They can see nothing of the man leaning against a window-frame so high above their heads. And he, for his part, is not sorry to forget the troublous outside world for a time. His own reflections are far from pleasant just now; and to comfort himself to some extent, perhaps, to smooth the ruffled course of his thoughts, he lights a cigar, an unwonted luxury, which is therefore more thoroughly appreciated. On one point he had made up his mind, even before he left the Kaleidoscope Theatre. Lord Fermanagh, who is coming up to town to-morrow, shall certainly receive a word of caution from the ex-tutor as to the undesirability of John Harford's companionship for his young cousin Kempton.

It is more than provoking to Maurice, who has fulfilled his duty as guardian to the son of

the proud house of Fermanagh with unremitting energy, zeal, and devotion, to find that on the only occasion of his absence from his post that adventurous pupil of his should have kicked over the traces and made some running on his own account. The bare facts of the case seem amazing to Maurice, as he mentally passes them in review.

Lord Kempton behind the scenes, and in familiar conversation with a ballet-girl—wonderful!

The youth is preternaturally grave and reserved, and, as a rule, clings to and upholds the traditions of "caste" with an almost inflexible rigidity. He really emulates the earl his father in every detail of creed and bearing. His lordship is a stanch Conservative and a martinet as regards discipline. To young Kempton the head of the house appears "very good form;" and he has religiously striven to model himself after this excellent pattern. Considering the difference in the age of father and son, the latter has succeeded remarkably well.

It seems as difficult to Maurice to picture the Earl of Fermanagh himself in merry converse with a saucy ballet-girl, as to imagine grave

Kempton amidst such undignified surroundings. And yet the fact of the adventure remained, acknowledged—ay, boasted of—by the chief actor in it.

Lord Kempton is only just twenty-one, but he looks much older. By nature he is careless and easy-going; so it has certainly been a matter of some difficulty to him to acquire that air of hauteur and reserve on which he prides himself.

Maurice knows the lad's natural proclivities well, and is thoroughly aware of the substratum of placable indolence which underlies his self-possessed manner. He is of the world worldly, and Maurice sincerely hopes that boyish fickleness may be latent among his other hidden qualities. But there is certainly some cause for anxiety, thinks the tutor, as he remembers his pupil's sudden and strange change of demeanour at the Kaleidoscope. Lord Kempton earnest, eager, and demonstrative in his admiring plaudits; talking with enthusiasm of moral perfection, which is above rank and station; clenching his fist and ready to inflict personal chastisement on Mr. Hoaks, because that enterprising gentleman chooses to manage his theatre according to his idiosyncrasies

and with scant regard for the moral welfare of the *corps de ballet*—this unexpected metamorphosis is enough to arouse Maurice's alarm.

Had Kempton contented himself with some passing allusion to Miss Delane's perfections, had he spoken with a light laugh, and told his *rencontre* behind the scenes as a joke, there would have been no cause for anxiety. But this was not the spirit in which the young peer alluded to his adventure with "Susie."

Heavens, if this lad should have fallen in love also! Fallen in love, and with a ballet-dancer! He certainly has betrayed an amount of interest and enthusiasm to-night which is equally at variance with his *code* and his usual practice. Let us bow our proud heads, and cry *Miserere!*

No wonder Maurice works himself up into a state of terrible apprehension, as his brother's love-sick complaints and wailings are still ringing in his ears.

"It seems like the second act of a very realistic comedy," he thinks, smiling as this view of the "situation" occurs to him. And then he leans forward again and watches the curling cloudlets of smoke as they float along on the light evening breeze.

He himself, standing in the full blaze of a gas-lamp, appears like a white silhouette, clearly defined against the black background of night. He is really tall; but the breadth of his well-knit frame takes away from his height. His hair is dark, save where the light brings out a gleam of reddish hue, which lurks in the depths of the waving masses, and again betrays itself in the curling tips which rest on the low wide brow. His eyes are keen and bright, and look out from their dark lashes inquiring and attractive. In the sunlight they appear green, just now they seem gray; but at all times they are candid and clever, the honest mirrors of an honest man's soul. His features are clear-cut and regular, the chin well moulded, square, and firm. The mobile mouth inclined to be satirical, save when that rare smile which women have described as "beautiful" transfigures the pale, clear, statuesque face.

Such, in outward appearance, is Maurice Steele, as he stands in that cosy familiar den of his for the last time, and reviews the position of affairs with that pleasant companion, a good cigar. "The second act of a comedy; yes. All the actors are armed with their parts; but I have none given to me. I am only looking on, and yet I do not

feel in the independent position of the spectator *pur et simple*. I cannot take up my hat and walk out of the theatre as soon as I feel bored, tired, or irritated by the aspect of affairs. Nor am I as deeply engaged in the progress of this realistic comedy as are the actors themselves. My assistance may or may not be required; all I can do is to hold myself in readiness at the wing, and thence to watch the general proceedings of those so deeply involved in this mad play yclept *The Love of Boys*."

Presently Maurice forgets the personal trouble and discomfort inseparable from his position, *vis-à-vis* "the boys," in whom he takes so much interest. Most men would pooh-pooh the whole affair, call it "ridiculous, beneath contempt, childish folly," etc. This Maurice cannot do. He thinks, and has reason to hope, that Lord Kempton's sudden fancy may prove as fleeting as it was startling. And he knows that the young aristocrat is susceptible to worldly considerations. Family pressure, duly brought to bear upon him, cannot fail to have a desirable effect. He loves his fond mother as much as he fears his stern father.

But with Harold the affair in any case must prove more serious. He, under his light debonair

manner, his joyous laugh, and frankly ingenuous speech, possesses a depth of sentiment as profound as it is unexpected by those who listen to his merry talk and see the mischievous sparkle in his bright-blue eyes.

Of late those eyes have been dimmed by many hot and bitter tears, which scorched the more because they have been shed in secret, Hal feeling as much ashamed of them as of all else that appeared womanish and silly to others. To himself his grief seems as sacred as it is incurable. Incurable until Clare shall be found, that is.

All this Maurice realises, as also that his young brother is as innocent, or certainly as guileless now as he was five years ago, when he recommended his handsome bride-elect to the tender mercies of his scheming ambitious mother. "Poor Hal!" thinks Maurice, flinging his cigar out of the window, and closing it with a weary yawn and stretch. "Poor Hal! he indeed is loyalty personified. Worldliness and calculation must enter prominently into Kempton's scheme of life; but to Hal they are words with no meaning. He swears that his love can never change, and is as confident of the lasting good faith of the beloved

one as he is of his own. Kempton might yield for a time to pleasant external influences, but he would always be on his guard; no fleeting feeling would ever lead him to forget himself, or what is due to his position. Harold, on the contrary, where he gives himself at all, reserves nothing, and opposition in any shape will but serve to make him cling to his purpose with the more resolute tenacity."

These are the conclusions Maurice, after profound and painful meditation, has arrived at; and he is by no means satisfied with the aspect of affairs as they present themselves to his view, an interested but inactive spectator from the wings. He little thinks, poor man, that when he enters upon his new life on the morrow, the life which is to be devoted to literature and rest, he will but be moving a step nearer to the time when he will be called upon to leave his post of observation, and himself take an active, if not a prominent, part in the social drama on which he has so anxiously pondered over his cigar.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE ACADEMY.

Think naught a trifle, though it small appear;
Small sands the mountain, moments make the year,
And trifles—life.

We never go to meet, of set purpose, the important events of this life. We turn suddenly around a corner and come upon them face to face.

WEEKS passed on—weeks composed of grievously trying days and hours, each one of which added to the measure of poor Harold's acute suffering and truly agonising suspense.

Maurice was comfortably settled in his new quarters by this time, and did his best to devote himself to that literary labour to which he had so long looked forward. But how can intellectual pursuits thrive when their would-be author is liable to perpetual distraction? This was Maurice's case at the present time.

Morn, noon, and night he was never free from Harold's invasions. His visits certainly did not

last long; but what they lacked in length was more than made up for by repetition.

The *Saragossa* was paid off now, and the young sailor had his time at his own disposal. He spent every hour of it in alternately bemoaning and wildly seeking his lost love. He had adhered to his original determination, and had not "darkened the doors" of his parents' house again. He sternly refused to see either his mother or sisters; and once, when he heard the sound of the girls' voices, as he entered the house in which Maurice was lodging, the irate youth turned and fled.

He wandered about London like an unquiet spirit, seeking his Clare, but finding her not.

He had one interview with his father, which was eminently unsatisfactory to both parties.

Mr. Steele, in telling Maurice about this visit of his brother's, added his conviction that the boy was "off his head."

"I suppose he will return to his senses some day," added the old man peevishly; "but I hope he makes no mistake about my intentions. If he fancies I am going to beg for the honour of his company in Hyde Park Place, he is decidedly mistaken, and you may tell him so."

Maurice smiled. It must seem very strange to the hard-headed old City man who had lived all his life for money, money, money only, to find one son preferring clean hands to a full purse, and the other thinking love the sole necessity of earth or heaven. No wonder James Steele did not understand his boys, but rather looked upon them as problems insoluble.

Mr. Garbles's ambition was fired by the unforeseen difficulties the finding of Clare presented, and he certainly left no stone unturned which might lead him to the discovery of that mysterious young lady's hiding-place. She was not working in any of the schools of fine-art needlework; nor was she supplying any shops in London. On that point Mr. Garbles declared himself absolutely satisfied. And as neither his *employés* nor Maurice or Harold obtained any trace of the missing one, the ex-detective, who could not claim more money from his client since he evidently made no progress on the road of discovery, began to tire of the case at last, and contented himself with the problematical statement that "Missy" had most likely gone off to the Continent. "They always does it, sir," he said coolly. "They manages to get their fifty shillings by 'ook or by

crook, and then they slopes—it is their nature to-o.”

Where, then, was Clare?

It is possible to hide oneself, and to remain securely hidden, in the midst of London—crowded London.

Perhaps it was thus Clare lay *perdu*.

Time went on, and Maurice began to feel seriously alarmed on Harold's account. His friend, young Sumner, with whom the sailor was staying, said that he ate very little, slept not at all, and seemed a prey to the one all-absorbing grief.

“We shall be having him down with brain-fever or something worse if he goes on like this much longer,” poor Harold's friend said anxiously.

And Maurice felt that it devolved upon him to take some decisive step for his brother's ultimate welfare.

“We must get him sent abroad, and at once,” he said, taking a sudden resolution. “I will write to Admiral Styles. He will take him to China if I put the true state of the poor lad's case before him.”

“God bless you, Maurice,” cried Sumner, “how little you know about Hal's real state! He

told me only last night that if he were ordered abroad now he would throw up the Service and live upon his godfather's legacy."

Maurice ground his teeth. He felt himself unequal to further discussion concerning one so utterly lost to reason, to all sense of manliness, as Harold began to appear to him now.

To throw up all his prospects of a distinguished future, of an honourable career, for the sake of—what?—a pretty wilful girl, who chose to hide herself from the only friends she had in the world!

In his natural impatience with Harold, Maurice for the moment forgot the wrongs which had driven Clare forth from the shelter of his father's house.

But presently he remembered all, and felt the old compassion for the homeless wanderer.

"We must try for some home appointment for him if he refuses to go abroad," Maurice said to Jack Sumner, who was watching him anxiously. He also felt greatly troubled on Hal's account.

"I am sure you are wise in getting the dear old fellow to do something—anything," he said. "Action and change must benefit him. If he goes on like this his brain will soften, or he'll take to drink, or go to the devil in some way."

"Something shall be done, and at once, that I will undertake," said Maurice, with decision; and went straight away to Hyde House, where he was certain of a hearing, and probably of assistance from Lord Fermanagh, who had a brother at the Admiralty.

The following week Harold Arthur Steele was duly appointed to the flagship at Portsmouth.

"He will ruin himself running backwards and forwards to London," growled Mr. Steele senior, when he read the appointment in *The Times*.

"Better do that than ruin himself by throwing up his profession altogether," said Maurice, who had had the greatest difficulty in inducing his brother to accept even this home appointment.

Two or three days before Harold was to join his new ship, the brothers were strolling along Piccadilly together; and Harold, who was always on the *qui-vive* when he found himself in a crowded thoroughfare, remarked on the unusual number of people loitering in the vicinity of the Academy. The sight of a tall woman who carried her head erect, always set his heart beating wildly; and even Maurice's equable temper had been ruffled beyond control once or twice by the

frantic endeavours of Harold to look into the face of such ladies as aroused his momentary curiosity.

Poor Harold, what disappointments he made for himself! How unlike his Clare were most of the tall girls at whom he gazed with such startling earnestness!

"Of course there is a crowd here," said Maurice, striving to tighten his grasp on his brother's arm, as that impetuous youth was about to pursue another tall phantom. "The Academy has only been opened three or four days. Come in and have a look round, Hal; when you get down to Portsmouth you will be expected to have 'done the pictures.'"

"Curse the pictures!" growled Harold savagely. His characteristic in these days was universal anathema.

"Curse them, if you please, old growler," answered Maurice good-humouredly; "only come and help me look at a few."

Harold yielded, but not with a good grace. All places were indifferent to him now; but he had an idea that he was more likely to meet Clare in the street than elsewhere, and for this reason avoided even shops, unless compelled to enter them. Might she not pass by a window to-

wards which he, standing at the counter, would be turning his back?

On the steps of Burlington House Maurice met a man whom he knew slightly, a colonel of engineers.

"Would you like my catalogue, Steele?" asked this obliging person. "I take as great an interest in the show as you do, and have marked some of the best pictures."

Maurice thankfully accepted the offer.

"Don't come away without having a look at Percy Hetheringham's picture. There is always a crowd around it; but bide your time, it is well worth waiting to see."

"All right, and thanks again," said Maurice, and the brothers passed on.

Ascending the staircase, he began to examine the catalogue.

"We must look out for this wonderful picture of Hetheringham's, Hal," he said. "Colonel Peel is a judge; we've had many a chat about art. It is the one subject we have in common."

Harold felt he had no subject in common with anyone just now, and followed his brother mechanically.

"Ah, I have it!" exclaimed Maurice, turning

down a page of the catalogue, "Room IV., 'Maud Muller,' by P. Hetheringham.

And the young girl mused beside the well,
Till the rain on the unraked clover fell.

Let us make our way to Room IV. at once."

"Right," answered Hal. Room XX. would have been the same to him.

They push their way through the well-dressed but not always well-mannered crowd; and after a tedious delay find themselves outside the serried ranks, pressing close to what is evidently *the* picture of the room.

"We cannot get near it for the next hour," says Harold wearily. "Give it up for to-day, Maurice."

He is longing to be out in the fresh air again—longing to be back in the streets, intent on his eternal quest.

"No, Hal," says his brother decisively. "Have some patience, for my sake. Peel said this picture was worth waiting for; and I mean to wait."

Harold resigns himself to circumstances, or rather to the strong will of his brother.

Maurice having a certain purpose in view, is

quite content to bide his time until its accomplishment is at hand.

When the inner circle of the admiring crowd begins to move, and he sees a space clear before him, he pushes Harold forward.

Movement of any kind is agreeable to the latter, since it seems to bring him a step nearer to his exit from this horrid throng.

He has no hope of meeting Clare here; but in the streets—

By this time he stands face to face with the picture of "Maud Muller."

And, less than a minute after, he is struggling back through the ever-increasing crowd. He pushes his way, utterly regardless of protest and vituperation, until he has seized his brother's arm.

"Come and look, Maurice! She is here—here!"

His face is white—ghastly. His lips tremble, so that he can barely articulate, and his eyes have the look in them of one who has seen a ghost.

"Hush, man, hush!" whispers Maurice fiercely. "Every one can hear you. For Heaven's sake command yourself, and don't make a scene here. What has happened now?"

Maurice has witnessed the blighting of so many false hopes on the poor overwrought boy's part lately, that he only expects to behold another tall and visionary likeness to the missing Clare in the *her* he has just been summoned to "come and look at."

But as he, in his turn, stands face to face with the picture of "Maud Muller," he also knows that this is the portrait—and a marvellous likeness—of Clare Redmond.

It is nearly three years now since he beheld the original; but he has not a moment's doubt as to her identity.

That face with its rich colouring and perfect contour, is unique. Those lustrous dark eyes, so full of wistful pathos, are Clare's eyes.

They look sadder, almost reproachfully out from the canvas, and the girl seems much older, more fragile, and yet more womanly in appearance.

Gazing with rapt attention upon that beautiful face, Maurice, who looks with a man's eyes, as well as with an artist's criticism, upon the painting, understands and forgives his brother's ravings.

But now?

"We must go and find Hetheringham in-

stantly," exclaims Harold, seizing the catalogue to find the artist's address.

"Gently, Hal," says Maurice quietly, withdrawing himself from the crowd, and leading the way to one of the centre ottomans. "Sit down here for a moment. You look like a ghost still. I know Hetheringham; there will be no difficulty about finding him. I was at his studio two or three times before I left England, and when Kempton and I met him in Vienna he asked us to look him up as soon as we returned to London."

"Then don't keep me sitting here. Let us be off at once!" cries Harold, starting up.

"I must just speak a word to that little gray-haired man first," says Maurice, rising also, and making his way along the room. "That is Sturge, the art-critic, and he knows Hetheringham intimately. He may be able to give us some information."

"Right," says Harold, and his restless impatience is merged in keen interest.

The moment has at last arrived when he begins to see his way to the end he has had in view for the last six wretched interminable months,

and now he can afford to wait with a good grace just for a minute or two.

Maurice, meanwhile, is thankful for this momentary delay, this check on Harold's reckless impatience. The elder man is, in fact, afraid.

He does not at all like the idea of going off with Harold on the spur of the moment to beard Hetheringham in his den. He knows something of that gay young artist personally, and far more by repute. He remembers the society Master Percy mixed with in Vienna, and he calls to mind certain stories in which that gay Lothario has played conspicuous parts in London. And he wisely concludes that it will be most desirable for all parties concerned to keep Harold and the Bohemian apart for the present.

Sturge, the art-critic, is fortunately unable to tell the brother anything definite about the model who sat for "Maud Muller."

"Hetheringham was quite mysterious about his chief picture this year," he tells them, screwing up his wizened ferret-like face. "In fact, he showed it to no one until the last Sunday before 'sending in.' Kept the subject and the model dark, you know. We were chaffing him about this mysterious reaper the other night at the Aca-

demy Club; but he turned sulky and walked off. That's his way when he is put out, you know. We had all seen his other pictures; but no one had heard of this 'Maud Muller,' which is out and out the best thing Master Percy has done as yet. 'Taking the Pitcher to the Well' is here, in Room VI. Have you seen it? Quite a gem. 'Peter the Hermit' is weak in composition; but the colour is good. 'Maud Muller' is certainly his masterpiece. He has his foot well in the stirrup just now; no doubt about that. Lucky dog! he has actually sold the three. What can a man——"

"*Where* is this man Hetheringham now?" interrupts Harold fiercely. He can restrain his impatience no longer. What on earth does Hetheringham's luck signify to anyone? He wants to find Clare, and can await no further dissertation from the loquacious little critic.

That diminutive person has not perceived Harold hitherto, and now turns and looks at him with considerable astonishment.

Agitation and excitement are legible in every line of the young fellow's pale nervous face. His voice trembles; indeed, he is trembling all over.

"My brother, Mr. Sturge," says Maurice, in-

roducing them. He feels annoyed by Harold's too evident want of self-control. "We are very anxious to see Hetheringham at once on a matter of urgent business," he explains, meeting the critic's inquisitive eyes with as much indifference as he can command in his own. "Have you any idea if he is in town just now?"

"I really can't tell you," answers Sturge uneasily. Something in the younger brother's resolute face has alarmed him. He has a great liking and admiration for Percy Hetheringham, "the rising genius of the day," and would far rather save him from, than expose him to, anything like "trouble." And Harold's mien is certainly threatening. "Something about that mysterious model, no doubt," is the thought in his mind, as he replies to Maurice's inquiry. "I suppose he is in town. Most men are here just now. I saw him the day before yesterday at the club. Ah, by-the-bye, he told me then that he was thinking of going abroad almost immediately; but he did not say where or for how long. You are sure to find out at his studio."

"Thanks, thanks," whispers Maurice hurriedly; while Harold is violently dragging him by the arm.

"I'm off to-morrow," he cries. "Don't forget that, Maurice. We have not a moment to lose."

"Of course there's a woman in this," mutters Sturge, wiping his eyeglass carefully before he turns his attention to a fresh picture. "Oh Percy, my boy, what a fine fellow you'd be if it were not for those treacherous women!"

Mr. Archibald Sturge was a devotee to misogamy.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRACK.

Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay :
To-morrow's falser than the former day—
Lies worse; and while it says, "We shall be blest
With some new joys," cuts off what we possess.

THE brothers are soon seated in a hansom, and speeding towards Chelsea, the district in which Mr. Percy Hetheringham's studio is situate.

Harold is calmer now, earnest, eager, expectant, and silent.

Maurice is also silent for a while, but far from happy; and after a time his uneasiness manifests itself in a pertinent question.

"Would it not be much better, Hal," he says impressively, "to let me tackle Hetheringham by myself?"

Harold turns sharply, and faces his elder brother with keen scrutiny in his blue eyes. They have lost all their brightness of late, the wonted look of boyish merriment has died out of them;

but they are steadfast, penetrating, serious, and Maurice does not care to meet them lest they should discover the thoughts in his mind at the moment.

"Of course I shall go with you," says Hal, with prompt decision. "He can have nothing to say to you that I should not hear."

"I hope not," answers Maurice doubtfully.

"You hope not!" cries his brother, with passion. "Do you think I will permit you to express a doubt about her—about my Clare?"

The young fellow's voice sounds so piteous, as he lingers over the last words, that Maurice refrains from further remark. Great compassion is possessing him, as he realises the nature of the foreboding which Sturge's comments had previously aroused in his thoughtful mind.

Nothing was known of the model who stood for "Maud Muller." Percy had been "chaffed" about her; but had remained mysteriously silent. It was this last assertion which most alarmed Maurice, for he knew Percy's character well as regarded women.

He was unscrupulous in what he did, but very careful in all he said.

What if Hetheringham had been the real

cause of Clare's flight, and Lord Verstrume merely a pretext?

With such troubled thoughts perplexing and tormenting him, no wonder Maurice takes refuge in silence.

"At last!" exclaims Harold, as the cab draws up opposite a long low glass building, a combination of shop and conservatory, over which "E. SPRUCE" is printed in conspicuous red letters.

Harold is about to enter the shop, when Maurice stops him. "I know the way to the studio," he says; "follow me." And he walks along a narrow passage which leads to the back of the conservatory.

The end of the passage opens out on to a sort of courtyard in which two separate houses stand facing the back of "E. Spruce's" establishment.

Brass plates adorn the doors of the houses, on the stone front of which is graven "Baskerville Studios, 1, 2."

No. 1 surmounts the brass plate bearing the name "Percy Hetheringham."

No. 2 belongs to "Paul Everitt."

"Will you knock, or shall I?" asks Harold.

He speaks in hot haste, and before Maurice has time to reply, he seizes the knocker on the door of No. 1, and raps as though he would rouse the dead.

In this case quick and dead are callous: there is no reply.

Then Maurice attacks door No. 2, and this is presently opened by Mr. Paul Everitt in person:

"I have a model sitting," says Mr. Everitt crossly. "You must excuse me; cannot see anyone just now."

He holds his resplendent palette in one hand, his mahl-stick in the other, and has a pipe in his mouth.

His eyes betoken surprise and indignation, and his utterance, owing to the pipe, is indistinct.

"Can you tell me anything about your neighbour, Mr. Hetheringham?" asks Harold anxiously. The artist's angry impatience does not dismay him in the least.

"Gone abroad—think—don't know," says Everitt, and closes his door.

Maurice, who knows artists, and respects their work, is not aggrieved. Harold is.

"Brute!" he mutters.

"He has a model posing; we couldn't expect

him to receive our interruption graciously," says Maurice. "Come back, and we will inquire at the shop."

Harold leads the way this time, stalking along the straight narrow passage as though he wears seven-league boots. When he has turned the corner and fronts the shop, he stumbles over a boy, who is kneeling on the ground filling up a row of flower-pots with mould.

"Hullo!" exclaims the lad, who has just escaped being run over by the gentleman's impatient feet.

"Beg pardon, my man," says Harold, with a smile. He always has a smile for children. "I was in a hurry and did not see you. I did not hurt you, I hope?"

"Lor', no, sir!" says the boy, wistfully watching the hand of his interlocutor as it glides into a waistcoat-pocket, and producing a shilling, offers it to Joe.

"Can you tell us anything about Mr. Hetheringham, who lives at No. 1 round the corner?" asks Maurice.

"He's a hartiss, sir," says Joe, as if that answered all possible inquiries.

"And where is he now?" asks Harold.

"Gone abroad, sir," answers Joe. "Perhaps mother knows where. Shall I call mother, sir? She's in the parlour a-back of our shop."

"Stop a moment, boy," says Maurice, who is always practical. "Have you seen a tall handsome young lady coming here lately?"

"A good many ladies comes past here at times," says the boy. "But they goes straight down the passage and into yer studier. They goes to have their picturs took; but I never noticed what they was like. They goes down, and Mr. Hetheringham he lets 'em in hisself; we don't know nothing about 'em."

"Joe, you young vagabones, who are yer a-talking to?" exclaims a shrill voice from within the shop.

"That's mother, and ain't she in a wax just!" exclaims Joe, with a gesture the reverse of respectful. And then he hides the shilling in his shoe.

"And what can I do for you, sir?" inquires Mrs. Spruce, appearing on the threshold of her shop, and changing her tone the moment she perceives that "swells" are conversing with her Joe. "Roses is coming on fine, or is it cut flowers you might be wanting?"

"We want a little information, if you will kindly give it?" suggests Maurice politely.

Selling is more in Mrs. Spruce's way than giving; but she manages to smile, as she says:

"Won't you step in and have a look round?" Gents mostly like a buttonhole; whether or no, she reflects; and these do look as if they could pay.

But when she finds that she is to be interrogated *à propos* of Mr. Hetheringham's models, she assumes an air of virtuous indignation.

"There's lots of 'em as comes and goes," she says; "but I take very good care to know nothink about young persons as goes to any studi-ers."

Mrs. Spruce speaks as though the "studi-er" were a den of iniquity, and its frequenters the reverse of respectable. It is only when Maurice, inspired by a happy thought, requests her to select a dozen of her finest roses for him, that "virtue" unbends, and scenting a profitable sale, becomes suddenly communicative.

"I do seem to remember," she says; "and it's the colour of these han'som' roses as brings it to my mind. I do remember Mr. 'Etheringham a-buying of some red camillas for a tall fine-looking young woman as stood in the doorway

while I was cutting of 'em. She was a pretty creature; but she looked that miserable I could not 'elp a-pitying of her, though she were—a modell."

Mrs. Spruce utters the last obnoxious word as though it burnt her tongue.

"She looked miserable!" exclaims Harold, "Was she anything like this?" and he produces a carte-de-visite photograph of Clare from his pocket-book—of Clare as she was five years ago.

"That's 'er!" says Mrs. Spruce. "That's 'er, sure enough; but she must 'ave 'ad a bad illness since, she were that thin, and her eyes were that big, and looked all 'oller, like as though she'd been a-frettin' or—or starved, or somethink. Her dress were very poor too, just a skimpy gown and a bit of a jacket, what they calls a *costume* in the shops, and no shawl, and such a bitter cold day."

"Maurice!" groans Harold, and clutches his brother's arm; but Maurice, having struck the colloquial vein in Mrs. Spruce, is determined to hear more—at all events to find out all his informant can tell.

He learns that Clare went to the studio day after day for some months, and that the last time Mrs. Spruce saw her she was quite bright, and

looked handsome and cheerful too. That was but a few weeks ago, and she had a decent gown to her back then. "Not that she ever dressed fine, sir," is Mrs. Spruce's concluding statement; "but she did look comfortable and well-to-do, and she always spoke kind and pleasant-like, not giving of herself airs. Poor soul, I do believe as she were too good to be one of them modells."

A supplementary order for two dozen assorted carnations, each one "fit for a specimen," elicits still further information from Mrs. Spruce.

It is her business to clean out the studio and "do" for Mr. Hetheringham. She holds the key, and goes and gives the place "a bit of a dusting" once a week now he is away. "Gone abroad" is all she can say on that subject. No orders have been given about forwarding any letters. Those that come are left in the letter-box. "Them hartiss is all so uncertain," she says. "'Ere to-day and gone to-morrow." And, after some hesitation, she consents to let the gentlemen take a look round at the studio, though she is sure Mr. Hetheringham would be in a fine fury if ever he knew it; for he's a "very par-tickler sort of gent—he is."

"Come along, Hal," says Maurice; "we may find some further clue in the studio."

Maurice's fears are beginning to take shape, and every word Mrs. Spruce has said confirms his suspicions. How had Clare made Hetheringham's acquaintance, and how had it come about that she—who had so much talent and so many money-making resources—had condescended to earn her bread as a model?

Do subtle means exist by which thought is communicated without the help of words?

Maurice thinks so, as he enters the studio and glances at Harold's darkening brow and his pale set lips. "God forbid that he should meet Hetheringham now!" thinks the elder brother; and then for a moment he forgets his companion, as his appreciative eyes fall on the decorations of the ante or reception-room which leads to the large studio beyond. In this gem of a "parlour" all Percy Hetheringham's artistic taste is displayed. The paper on the walls is one of Morris's *chefs-d'œuvre*; the curtains were brought from the far East; and each article of furniture has a history of its own, and has been "treasure trove" in some distant foreign city by Percy himself, who is an authority, as well as a

connoisseur, of styles, periods, and gems of all kinds.

All these signs and wonders absorb Maurice's attentions; but Harold has no eyes for anything but a simply-framed water-colour sketch which hangs upon the wall over the richly-carved oak mantle-piece.

It is no masterpiece, this stately iris, with its slender leaves, which rivets Harold's attention; but it is cleverly drawn, and coloured with taste; and beneath it is written, in a hand that he knows well, poor boy!—

“Maud Muller fecit.”

He stands for a minute or two staring at the sketch, until the iris seems to be painted in flames of fire, and to dance wildly before his affrighted eyes. He tries to speak; but the words refuse to come. His tongue is paralysed, there is a maddening mist before his eyes.

“Oh sir, the gentleman is ill!” exclaims Mrs. Spruce, touching Maurice's arm and pointing to his brother.

Maurice turns quickly, and steps aside, only just in time to catch Harold in his arms as he falls forward—insensible.

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTING.

True faith and reason are the soul's two eyes :
Faith evermore looks upward, and descries
Objects remote; but reason can discover
Things only near—sees nothing that's above her.

A SPLITTING headache and a sense of utter prostration were the natural consequences of the varied and terrible emotions Harold had passed through, on the day of his visit to the Academy. He had spent a sleepless miserable night, his active thoughts assuming the most hideous and cruel aspect, as thoughts are wont to do during the long trying hours of darkness.

Maurice came to his brother's bedside early the next morning; for this was the day fixed for Harold's departure. Seeing the poor lad's haggard and woe-begone appearance, he greatly feared that fresh difficulties would arise, and that the appointment obtained for the sailor with so much trouble would, after all, be sacrificed at the moment of its ratification.

"I suppose you feel as you look—unequal to a journey, Hal?" he asked, in a tone which, if not hopeless, was certainly resigned.

To his surprise, Hal lifted his head from the pillow and said quietly:

"I am not up to much to-day, I admit, but I shall certainly go, since I have pledged myself. A headache is only a woman's complaint after all, and even our ladies manage to get over that kind of suffering, if they have a ball or a journey and a pleasant partner in prospect. My prospects are not exactly enticing; but then—I am a man, and with me duty should be paramount always. After a while I may even teach myself that pleasure and duty are synonyms. Meanwhile it behoves me to do what 'England expects of every man' as readily as possible."

A smile, so faint as to appear weird, flickered over the lad's changed face as he spoke. Something dimmed Maurice's sight. He coughed away a choking feeling before he said:

"I am heartily glad you have plucked up the spirit to start, old boy. I am sure it is the very best thing you can do. Will you let me stay and do your packing for you now, as your train leaves at 2.45?"

To this Harold readily agreed.

The brothers lunched together somewhat hurriedly, and, both feeling the subject of yesterday's exploits too serious and important to admit of casual allusion, avoided it, each resolving to say the words nearest his heart—words which must be said before parting—at the last moment.

At 2.30 they are standing on the departure platform at Waterloo Station.

Maurice has taken the ticket. Maurice has seen the luggage labelled, and has attended to all the necessary details. Harold has stood unobservant, indifferent, lost in thought.

The sparkling vitality, hitherto his chief characteristic and greatest attraction, seems to have left him completely.

Cecilia had once not inaptly described her brother as "champagne well up." To-day she would probably have compared him to uncorked soda-water—flat and dull. Fortunately for all concerned, neither Cecilia nor Mrs. Steele are present at the brothers' parting.

Maurice is far too much absorbed by the duties he has undertaken to trouble his brother with comment, question, or suggestion; and Harold, if

he notices his surroundings at all, does so with a view to finding his senior disengaged, able and willing to attend to certain injunctions which it is absolutely necessary should be laid upon him before this miserable parting is a *fait accompli*.

"Now, Hal!" exclaims Maurice, clapping the "abstracted one" cheerily on the shoulder, and fully determined to arouse him effectually, "I really think I have settled everything for you. Your seat is secured, your hat-box and bag are in the carriage, your trunk is in the van. We have still seven minutes to spare; let us walk about. It is as well to stretch your limbs while you can, seeing the cramping process which awaits them in the railway-carriage."

"Right!" says Harold, as though obeying the word of command; and they turn and march up and down, down and up, side by side, apparently bent on "pacing the deck" in truly nautical fashion.

They have now concentrated their attention on one another, and are each of them absorbed in listening to those last parting words which they mutually feel to be of vast importance.

But though they have neither eyes nor ears

for outsiders, plenty of less preoccupied people are watching them.

And no wonder, for though these brothers differ materially in appearance, there is a natural distinction about them both which never fails to attract and rivet the attention of those who behold them.

No thinking man could fail to be impressed by the handsome, earnest, but utterly passionless face of grave Maurice; and certes no woman, young or old, flighty or steady, would bestow even a passing glance on yellow-haired Harold, without being moved by that keen sense of tender compassion and eager desire to "help and console" which characterise the "frail sex," whenever a good-looking youth is concerned.

Poor Hal's wistful expression, that rapt look of passionate longing and almost despair, might surely "make angels weep."

He is too young—too young and far too handsome—to be so miserable, think the tender-hearted ones, watching him with compassionate eyes as he paces wearily to and fro, taking no manner of heed of them or their glances.

"It is sure to be some treacherous woman's fault. Some flirt of a girl has deceived him."

This is the charitable conclusion of matron and maid; and with it comes a fresh impulse to try and console the handsome victim for the shortcomings of her—the undeserving one—for whom he is uselessly fretting.

“You will leave no stone unturned; you will not rest until you have found out Hetheringham’s whereabouts, Maurice; that you will promise faithfully, won’t you, my dear old boy?”

Harold’s heart is in his eyes, and all the earnestness of his nature thrills his voice, as he asks this question of his brother.

“Rely upon my doing all I can,” says Maurice, in his tone of quiet determination. And, after a little awkward hesitation, he adds, with a very different emphasis: “If my searching inquiry should lead to the worst, to the most painful certainty, Hal, what then?”

He stands still now, and confronts his brother with a look of anxious scrutiny.

“What then?” echoes Harold—and a flash of their wonted light beams in his blue eyes—“why this? That I shall stand by Clare through all. Nothing but her own will can sever her from me. Nothing she has done or left undone can change me. If she has fallen—which I pray God forbid!

—mine, and mine only, must be the hand to raise her up again—my darling, my poor lost darling Clare!”

Maurice is fairly at his wits' end. To him these heartbroken utterances, these wild gestures, seem like the ravings of a lunatic.

The people about them, the ever-inquisitive, prying, obtrusive crowd, which collects for any and for no reason if two or three happen to stand in their midst lost in eager discussion, is already approaching the brothers now, watching, listening, hoping for some more sensational manifestation of the pent-up feeling which impels these two to speak so earnestly—which causes the face of the younger to flush with emotion, while pale remonstrance is visible on the other.

“What's the row about? Why don't yer punch 'is head?” inquire a couple of precocious newsboys, who have pulled up with the burden of papers they are anxious to dispose of to intending travellers.

“Take your seats! Going on, going on, gentlemen?” cry hurrying guards; and breathless porters, with “By your leave!” place the brothers in jeopardy of loss of limbs under the crunching wheels of the swiftly-rolling luggage-trucks.

"Jump in, Hal!" cries Maurice, thankful that a diversion must be made. Even his stock of patience is nearly exhausted. Harold's frantic demonstrations on a railway platform are both unmanly and un-English. Maurice detests foreign effusiveness.

Of all this resentment Harold is quite unconscious. He takes his seat in the carriage, and, leaning from the window, tells his brother the thoughts still uppermost in his mind.

"Other men have raised women by the strength of their love. Why should I not do this for Clare if it be needful?"

"To my mind, love cannot exist without sincere respect," answers Maurice coldly, but with marked emphasis.

"How can you judge of a passion you are incapable of understanding?" says Harold, roused to bitterness by the other's want of sympathy.

"Upon my word, you're just like a woman yourself, Hal," answers Maurice. That last home-thrust has not missed its mark. "You think you reason, when you only feel."

"Well, good-bye, old man!" cries Harold, clutching at his brother's hand as the train com-

mences to move. "You will write, and at once, won't you?"

"I will," says Maurice, and, turning on his heel, walks moodily out of the station.

* * * * *

His position is hourly becoming more and more complicated and embarrassing. He feels there is much to be thought over, much to be done, and resolves to walk all the way to Hyde Park Place, that he may review the position of affairs without interruption. Walking and thinking go well together, and he settles to both as he sets forth with his long steady stride, which carries him swiftly over the ground without any seeming exertion.

"There was a time, not long ago," he thinks, "when I reflected very seriously on the state of my two boys' affairs. And then I congratulated myself on standing safely in the wings, a deeply-interested spectator surely; but by no means likely to take any active part in this wild-goose chase called 'Love.'

"Now, alas, I am called upon to start off on my own account, with hue-and-cry and tally-ho! —I, who care nothing for the sport, and in truth, am anxious our fox shall escape, or have so

securely hidden himself that neither by fair means nor foul shall be induced to come forth and cry 'Surrender!'

"Poor Hetheringham! Pardon the *infra dig.* simile; pray keep up the true *Reinecke* character for wariness, and don't let us find you at present. 'Twould surely be best so for all concerned. Our Hal would be saved from making an utter fool of himself, and we should all escape further anxiety and trouble, of which we have had about enough on his account already. Yes, Master Percy, you are in the sunny South by this time, most likely, and very sunny you must find it, if you are blessed with such preternaturally hot weather.

"'A welcome change after the fearful winter,' say all the Londoners; but I was abroad in the winter, and knew nothing of home grievances. And now I am bothered by worse trouble than climate ever inflicted on healthy men—the troubles attendant on other people's love-affairs. Ah, Percy Hetheringham, how am I to discover your whereabouts? And, having found that, how am I to wring the truth from your plausible smiling lips?

"And suppose you make full and free confession, and confirm my worst fears! What then? How can I tell your story to Hal? And what

will happen next? 'The footsteps of a future doom we hear, against whose coming naught will e'er prevail.'

"I suppose naught will prevail against this insensate passion of poor Hal's. And who can foretell the disastrous consequences of such folly? Mad youngster, who talks of raising the girl from sin by the strength of his love!

"Love? He taunts me with insensibility to the tender passion. I certainly could admit no love without perfect respect, and—Kempton!"

"Even so, my venerable tutor!" says the young lord, laughing, as he meets the surprised eyes of Maurice, who has suddenly turned his head as he felt himself tapped on the back. "What a pace you have been walking at! I have followed you from the other side of the bridge, and had to run to catch you up. What can have possessed you to rush along like this on such a hot day? You look as if you had just escaped from a *séance* in a Turkish bath."

"It is warm, certainly," remarks Maurice wiping his face, and evidently ill at ease.

"I begin to think your haste was that of a determined suicide," says Kempton, in evident astonishment.

My intentions were certainly not criminal," says Maurice. He begins to feel quite relieved by a rencontre which must force his thoughts into pleasanter channels. "If you're not better engaged, Kempton, I wish you would walk over to Hyde Park Place with me. You know how 'more than delighted' my people always are when you condescend to pay them a visit." Maurice laughs a little. The tuft-hunting proclivities of Mrs. and Miss Steele have been discussed between himself and pupil before now.

"I'd come with the greatest possible pleasure, Maurice. You know I would, although you laugh," says Kempton heartily. "I must always feel flattered by the great kindness your mother and sister show me. I do, upon my honour. But——"

"But you have some other engagement this afternoon?" asks Maurice regretfully. He has neglected his "people" more than ever since Harold's affairs have so engrossed his time and attention, and it has just occurred to him that if he could call now, accompanied by Lord Kempton, a smiling welcome would be accorded to both, and his sins of omission be pardoned without the ordeal of question and explanation, a "consummation devoutly to be wished."

Lord Kempton, meanwhile, with very evident embarrassment, is explaining that he is—yes, he really is—engaged, and on important—— Here he stops short, and breaking through the constrained conventional manner he is always ready to assume when not perfectly at his ease—“The fact is,” he explains, seizing Maurice’s arm, “I have promised to fetch Susie from the Kaleidoscope. There’s a morning performance on there, for some benefit or other, and I make a point of calling for as often as I possibly can ‘after the opera’s over.’” He hums the line to the vulgarised air, which in its purity belongs to one of the most pathetic of German ballads.

“Oh, then you have kept up your acquaintance with Miss Delane?” asks Maurice cautiously.

“Kept it up? Of course I have. And I think her the dearest and cleverest and the best—yes, Maurice, I can honestly repeat it—the best little woman that was ever seen, either on the stage or off.”

“And you visit this—Miss Delane?” asks Maurice.

“Visit her?” repeats Kempton, with a sudden and complete change of tone and manner. He was jubilant a minute ago; but now adds, with

the utmost despondency: "She does not allow me to visit her."

"Oh!" says Maurice, and ready suspicion whispers, "Clever hussy! leading him on to closer pursuit by such cunning resistance." Aloud he says: "But she does allow you to walk home with her, eh?"

"Yes, after a long while, and an awful deal of persuading, I got her to give me leave to wait for her at the stage-door as often as I can manage to be there," says the young lord, with reviving elation.

"And really, Maurice, that is all I live for now. You would hardly believe all the trouble and difficulty I have in getting away from dinners and places where my people are, without being called to account. Sometimes, I assure you, I hardly—but, Maurice," he interrupts himself, as a fresh thought startles him—"Maurice, dear old friend, you won't peach, will you now?"

"My dear child," cries Maurice, fairly laughing at this ingenuous slang on his ex-pupil's part, "I am leaving town to-morrow; but in any case I think you might be sure that I should respect your confidences. I had hoped to get away this evening; but I am detained by a matter of busi-

ness. I will not trouble you with details now; but one thing I will ask of you: if by any chance you should hear of Percy Hetheringham's whereabouts, let me know, and at once."

"Hetheringham—do you mean the jolly artist who gave us a supper at Vienna?" asks Kempton, laughing; and seeing Maurice's affirmative nod, he adds, "Then you know he has gone abroad?"

"So I heard at his studio yesterday; and that was all the information I could obtain there."

"Of course, because that old charwoman knows nothing," says Kempton, watching Maurice's surprised face with interest. "Now, strange as it may appear, my venerable tutor, I, by the oddest coincidence, happen to know everything."

Maurice fairly starts as he hears this bold assertion.

"Everything that concerns our jovial artist's present whereabouts, that is," explains Kempton, who in his momentary hilarity has laid aside his assumption of frigid indifference, and seems to enter into his tutor's perplexities with quite a boyish enjoyment. "My dear mater saw that beautiful picture of 'Maud Muller' in the Academy, and raves above it. She says the girl's eyes haunt her; and she has talked of nothing else ever

since. They are wonderful eyes; have you seen the picture, Maurice? Well, to make a long story short, my father has consented to order a replica of the handsome model's face, who sat for 'Maud'; and I was commissioned to negotiate. I had a deal of trouble in getting the artist's address; but I didn't mind trouble, as the dear mother's pleasure was to be the result; and finally I succeeded in ascertaining that Mr. Hetheringham is at this moment in Sorrento. I have written to him, and am expecting his answer every day."

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede ye tent it;
A chiel amang ye takin' notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it.

So great is the relief Maurice feels, as the possibility of writing to Hetheringham assumes the aspect of certainty, that it seems as though a weighty burden had suddenly been lifted off him—the burden of a crushing responsibility.

Harold is out of the way, safe for a month to come, certainly. A perfectly amicable correspond-

ence may be entered upon between him (Maurice) and the wandering Bohemian, a correspondence which will solve all the enigmas surrounding the identity of the mysterious model with Clare Redmond.

Percy is a man of the world, and will no doubt write as frankly on the subject of his "Maud Muller" as on any other. He will feel confident that Maurice is not likely to misunderstand or in any way hold him responsible for the vagaries of a handsome and fanciful young woman, who goes to men's studios and poses as a model.

Maurice, according to his own showing, is by no means romantic, and a natural love of justice inclines him to view facts as they stand before him in all their naked stubbornness.

"Tempered with mercy" is an addendum, the value of which has never occurred to him as yet. If once this matter is fully explained and clearly understood between Hetheringham and himself, Maurice can have no further difficulty in bringing poor Hal to listen to reason. It is doubt that kills. Once the truth is ascertained, however cruel and bitter it may be, Harold will grapple with it manfully, and bear it and its consequences

as a Steele should. And then a meeting between the rivals—if they are rivals—can be averted; for if Harold once realises that Clare is lost to him he will yield to the force of circumstances, and face inevitable trouble with proud courage. Such is the “flattering unction” Maurice lays to his troubled soul; and feeling that for the present he certainly need take no further step in the matter of Harold *versus* Hetheringham, he determines to devote the rest of the afternoon to his ex-pupil and—Susie.

“Will you let me go to the Kaleidoscope with you, Kempton, since you cannot accompany me?” he asks, in so cheerful a tone that his lordship is fairly taken aback.

“Delighted, of course,” he replies cordially, and a faint colour shows in his pale thin face. “Nothing I’d like better than to take you behind the scenes, if you’ll come. I have the right of entry now. Old Hoaks has given me the password. He really is not such a brute as he looks, and—for Susie’s sake I put up with him. He is manager there, after all, and it makes things much pleasanter for my little girl if he sees she has friends at court. Don’t you understand?”

Oh yes; Maurice understands only too well;

and remembers with a touch of sarcasm—the time not far distant—when Kempton desired to take summary and personal vengeance on that “brute of a manager.”

Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur.

Ah, these boys, these boys! Both are in love, or think themselves so. The one with an impossible ideal, the other with a very matter-of-fact flesh and blood reality. But Alexander's feelings are evidently susceptible to startling changes, whereas Harold—if mad—is also steadfast in his hallucination.

* * * * *

Lord Kempton enters the Kaleidoscope by the stage-door this time, and Maurice closely follows him along the intricate passages, up and down the various steps and stairs.

They look into the green-room, which is large and airy, but sparsely furnished. Its chief ornaments are extensive looking-glasses, and portraits, photographic and other, of histrionic celebrities.

Thus they proceed towards the stage, meeting actors with the war-paint on, and amateurs who wear their hats jauntily, who affect a rose in the buttonhole, and a crutch-stick in the delicately-gloved hand. The nods and smiles generally be-

stowed upon Lord Kempton clearly prove how constant an *habitué* he has become behind the scenes during the last few weeks.

One frolicsome long-limbed damsel, who at this moment is very scantily attired in the smallest satin trunks, but wears multifarious fringes, spangles, necklets, and bangles, suddenly bounds into the wings where the two visitors are standing, and performs an elaborate pirouette before the astonished eyes of Mr. Steele. Then, adroitly balancing herself on one foot, she knocks Lord Kempton's hat off his head with an agile movement of the other. This gracefully (?) accomplished feat provokes a burst of laughter, and cries of "Bravo!" and "Encore!" from those who, standing idly by, have beheld it.

"You didn't know I was so clever as that, did you, my dear?" cries Miss "Belle Moss," lifting Lord Kempton's pointed chin with a sudden movement of her jewelled fingers, and pretending—only pretending—to impress a kiss upon his lips.

"It's really too bad of you, Miss Moss, to make up to another girl's spoon, and him a lord too!" exclaims another lady, who also bounds from the stage into the wing at this moment.

"You mind your own business, Miss Sauce,"

says Belle, with fine irony. "It isn't for want of making up to, if you don't get a regular army to be standing at your beck and call, ladles and gravy-spoons too, large and small, all complete, all most welcome, especially so if they're considered other ladies' property—there!"

As an accompaniment to her final ejaculation, Miss Moss snaps her fingers with a sound as of castanets; and she who has been called Sauce, and whose real name is Salmon, stamps her dainty satin-shod feet in a fury, and hisses out:

"Oh you spiteful! Don't you come wanting to borrow my ribbons to-morrow, nor my new necklace either, for you shall never have it again—never, never!"

With this she makes a wild dash at a gold-beaded chain Miss Moss is wearing, and strives to wrench it from her neck. The metal chain being strong, resists; but a long and elaborate string of coral beads gives way, and presently hundreds of bright-coloured drops are rolling about the floor.

Miss Moss turns livid with passion, and Miss Salmon, flushed and elated, breaks forth in a peal of exultant laughter.

These ladylike young persons are usually fast

friends; but this afternoon they hate one another, and all by reason of a misappropriated *encore*.

Miss Moss chose to take advantage of a mild recall, pranced on to the stage again, and danced her double-shuffle with such sustained energy that a third and genuine *encore* was vouchsafed by the house.

And thus Miss Matty Salmon was "done out of" her much-coveted *pas seul*; for the exasperated stage-manager hurried on the last scene and cut Matty's dance out. Hence her furious jealousy and hatred towards her erst bosom friend Belle.

"Now, young ladies, young ladies, if you please!" cries the unctuous voice of the sole manager, proprietor, and lessee, as its owner steps into the wings, where a crowd has by this time collected. "We must have the stage cleared for the last act. What does all this loitering and inattention mean? Ah, my dear lord!" Mr. Hoaks changes his tone very quickly, as he catches sight of the visitors, to whom he bows lowly and reverently, as he always does bow before the accredited bearer of a title. "And are these naughty girls of mine leading you a fine dance as usual? You spoil them, my lord, you really do. You are far too indulgent. And where's our

particular little friend, eh? our modest, our too modest Miss Vivian?"

"Excuse me, Hoaks. I see her," cries Kempton, and hastily darts across to the O.P.* side of the stage.

Maurice follows in silence. He is by no means delighted.

"Yes, Susie is too nice to be there at all," his own comment recurs to him, as he bows his head to the fair gentle-eyed maiden whom Kempton, with an irrepressible tremor in his voice, introduces as "Miss Delane."

How different she is from those bold noisy "ladies" on the other side of the stage! This much Maurice the just concedes on the instant. And while he enters into conversation with her, he continues mentally to sum her up, quietly and dispassionately as is his wont. He notices that she covers her blue eyes with their long-fringed lids, instead of throwing defiant glances, which seem like challenges to those who meet them. He sees that her skin is fresh, and wholesome as it is fair; and that the extra tint of red necessitated by the footlights is not exaggerated into vermilion stains, such as Miss Moss disports upon

* Opposite prompt.

a bed of powdered chalk. Susie's pretty figure is arrayed in dainty shepherdess costume to-day, and this is so cunningly contrived that the plump shoulders and arms, though visible, are not unnecessarily exposed to view. Her voice is soft and pleasant to listen to, and what her phrases lack in elegance is atoned for by the good sense which dictates them. Accusatives and datives are unknown quantities to her; but she appreciates the value of h's, and neither adds nor omits them.

"And you like your profession, Miss Delane?" Maurice inquires politely.

"Indeed, yes!" she says smiling, and frankly meeting his observant eyes. "Nothing worse could happen to me than to have to give up the theatre. But then, of course, that couldn't be," she adds; "for it's my salary as keeps poor old Gran and me too."

"Rather a heavy responsibility for so young a lady, isn't it?" asks Maurice, evidently interested.

"Well, I'm not a lady at all, you see, sir," she replies; "and so I suppose I don't feel it as those might who isn't brought up to work. For in the theatre we do have to work, and pretty hard too at times; though the people in front never seem

to give us no credit for that, but just consider dancing and acting is all fine fun, and quite as easy for us to do as for them to look at."

"Those who think at all must come to a very different conclusion surely?" says Maurice, as if prepared to argue the point.

"But then it's only one in a hundred who does," she says with prompt decision.

"Does what?" he asks.

"Think," she replies; and looking straight into his eyes, "you do," she adds.

"Plead guilty to the soft impeachment, whatever its nature, Maurice," says Lord Kempton, approaching.

He has purposely remained at some distance hitherto, pretending to be deeply interested in conversation with one of the "heavies" of the chorus—a worthy woman, and the proud mother of nine daughters, every one of whom "takes to the stage as natural as ducks does to water," so she says. This ponderous matron is always kind to Susie, and therefore receives courteous attention from Lord Kempton on all occasions. Just now he has been devoting himself to her entertainment because he is very anxious to give his ex-tutor the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* conversa-

tion with Susie, of whose grace and intelligence he is desirous Maurice shall be convinced as speedily as possible. Hearing Susie's emphatic declaration "You do," and seeing the archly accusing glance she bestows upon her interlocutor, Kempton thinks the *lête-à-lête* has been eminently satisfactory, and smilingly advises Maurice to "plead guilty to the soft impeachment."

"Miss Delane's discrimination is only equalled by her discretion," says his lordship. "If she convicts you, cry 'surrender,' and trust yourself unreservedly in her hands. She is as merciful as she is——"

"Small and insignificant," interposes Susie, making a saucy little bob-curtsy, which is in perfect keeping with her shepherdess costume and the smiling baby-face she turns towards Maurice. His grave looks and reserved manner had rather overawed her while she was speaking with him apart; but he is a friend of her dear lord's, and as such deserves to be propitiated at all hazards. Adoring Kempton, the true-hearted little woman feels herself called upon to think well of his friends, and also to find favour in their eyes as far as in her power lies. All this for the sake of her lover. When he approaches, and she feels

herself kept in countenance by his presence, her natural spirits assert themselves, and, quite at her ease, she shows herself in her true colours, a merry, sweet-tempered, light-hearted maiden, ready with sympathetic tears or laughter whenever either are required of her, brave and cheerful under most trying and adverse circumstances, thinking no evil and doing none. Truly charitable to others, she takes reciprocal charity for granted on all sides. She is truthful, intelligent, and grateful for the smallest kindness or attention. She admires Lord Kempton with all her mind; she loves him with all her heart. She considers him the incarnation of manly beauty and strength. She endows him with every virtue, she imagines him possessed of every accomplishment. The cold reserve of his manner to others makes his unbending towards her all the more flattering and delightful. To hear his measured speech quicken with eagerness when he addresses her, to see his dark heavy-lidded eyes brighten with smiling tenderness as they look into her laughing blue ones, thrills her with the delicious sense of triumph which only a loving single-hearted woman can ever experience. Lord Kempton thinks he loves Susie, and frequently argues the point with

himself. Susie neither reasons nor argues. Her love for "her lord" is an established fact now, and needs no further asseveration. Some day—ten years hence perhaps, but some day—she will certainly be his wife, and meanwhile is quite willing to content herself with as much of his time and his attention as he can conveniently spare her. Her grandmother is a Frenchwoman, and has instilled French manners (not morals) into Susie's mind as strictly *comme il faut*. No *jeune monsieur*, be he actor or amateur, is allowed to cross the threshold of Susie's simple home. Some day, if a *bonâ-fide fiancé* should present himself, Madame Delane might consent to receive him *chez elle*, but that could only happen if the wedding-day were fixed, the *dot* provided, and the consent of parents and guardians ascertained. Under present circumstances Susie thinks it best to say nothing at all about Lord Kempton. She can bide her time, and he is surely well worth waiting for. Hence her refusal to admit him "within the gates" of her humble residence in Dean Street, Soho. Only in the streets or in the wings of the theatre does she feel at liberty to talk to and to listen to him who has made her simple existence into such life as a good

woman loves best—the life that is lived for another.

With love in her heart, happiness dimpling her cheeks and shining in her bright blue eyes, no wonder Susie can chat and smile with thorough glee and enjoyment. Both Maurice and Kempton stand in the wing listening, talking to and laughing with her, until the refrain of a certain waltz falls on her ear.

“That is my cue,” she says; “I have to go on in the next scene, so good-bye to you both, gentlemen.”

“You may say *au revoir* to me, Susie, my darling,” whispers Kempton, seizing her soft little hand, and furtively pressing it to his lips. “I shall be waiting for you outside, as usual.”

“Well, *au revoir*,” she replies, waving her hand to both men; and with a bound she springs upon the stage, and a moment later is ministering to the stagey requirements of the leading lady in the burlesque.

Susie’s visitors are in a dilemma now; for they are still standing in the wings on the O.P. side of the stage, whence the shepherdess had to make her entrance at this particular juncture, and whence an exit presents considerable difficulties. Beyond

the wings heaps of ground-rows, set-pieces, sides, and borders are piled up, which effectually bar all egress; and, stepping boldly over these barriers, fresh impedimenta present themselves. For to the right and to the left such properties are ranged as will be required in this the final act of the burlesque. To the uninitiated all seems "confusion worse confounded;" but to the property-man there will be no difficulty in selection. Baskets of flowers, goblets, miniature flags, spears, halberds, game-pies, golden baskets piled with giant fruit, even the jewelled diadem with which the fair beggar-maid will anon be crowned by the amorous Cophetua. All these incongruous properties are lying ready to the hand of those who will presently come in search of them, and who are all sufficiently drilled in the mechanical detail of stage accessories to seize each one his or her own from out the piles which look like modern chaos to Maurice and his friend. By the time the banquet is served on the stage, and goblets and ornamental fruit deck the festive board, Lord Kempton has managed to force a passage for Maurice and himself to the front, and both are sitting in the stalls, watching, criticising, and applauding. Miss Vivian Delane comes in for a considerable share of applause from all

sides. She certainly deserves it, for her voice is sweet and she sings in tune, with a just appreciation of time, rhythm, and expression.

"She is prettier and does better every time I see her," whispers Lord Kempton, with irrepressible exultation.

"She really is charming, bright, clever, and good," answers Maurice promptly; and with particular emphasis he repeats: "She is certainly far too nice to be here."

CHAPTER X.

LOVERS.

A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrow's simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love-kisses, tears, and smiles.

"I MEAN to devote this afternoon entirely to you, sweetheart," says Lord Kempton, as he walks away from the Kaleidoscope by the side of Susie; "will you suggest a programme for our prospective amusement?"

At night she is willing and glad to take his arm when he accompanies her on her way home;

but now it is only five o'clock, and the long May afternoon is still sunny, fair, and bright.

"I guess you had far better not come with me at all, my dear lord," she says, shyly glancing first at her companion, then up and down the narrow lane which leads from the stage-door of the theatre into the crowded thoroughfare beyond.

"A nice grateful young lady you are, Miss Susie Delane!" he replies, laughing. "Here have I actually run the risk of offending my dear old friend and tutor for all time to come, and all for your sake. Is this sort of treatment a proper reward, I wonder?"

"Why, what have you done?" exclaims Susie, a little bewildered between his incomprehensible accusations of himself as well as of her, who certainly knows of no evil, intended or committed.

"Simply this, my child," he says, in that gravely paternal manner which always impresses her as a proof of his exceeding superiority, "I calmly turned my back upon Mr. Steele and his proffered companionship at the door of the theatre. I declined his urgent invitation to go and see some charming ladies—his mother and sister—with him; and now you, for whose sake I have behaved so inconsiderately, have the audacity to

tell me that I had better not come with you at all! Will you have the grace to explain this monstrous suggestion of yours, or do you bid me leave you on the instant? Say the word, Miss Delane, and I——”

He makes believe to turn away from her. A frightened look comes into her big blue eyes, and she touches his arm as if to detain him. He appears so grave at all times, and speaks in such solemn a fashion just now, that she is quite at a loss as to his real meaning and intention.

“Of course I never meant you to leave me,” she says, and her voice trembles a little. “I only thought that as it is daylight, and so many people about, it would be better—wiser for you and for me too, not to be walking along the Strand together. Some of your friends might see us, and I know you would rather avoid that just now; and I——”

“You are always right, my darling, the wisest and most discreet of your sex,” answers Kempton promptly; and as he speaks he turns off into one of the quiet streets which lead towards the Embankment. Susie follows him at a respectful distance. The love he has inspired in her gentle bosom is not of the kind “which casteth out fear.”

He appreciates and rather exults in this fact. To try her yet further he had felt inclined to bid her take his arm and walk along the Strand by his side, utterly regardless of consequences. Had he so bidden, she would have obeyed without hesitation or remonstrance. That was her nature; but his rash impulse was checked by the sight of a pair of high-stepping roans. That was the colour of the horses belonging to his mother's victoria, and his young heart throbbed with momentary apprehension. He loved his mother as much as he respected his father, and to meet either or both his parents while Susie was by his side was a catastrophe to be avoided at all hazards. Susie's sterling qualities, her virtues, and her innocence fitted her to take rank with any peeress in the land. Such had been Kempton's assertion, such was his conviction, no doubt. But the time had scarcely arrived when he felt himself fully prepared to make this declaration to his parents with becoming confidence; therefore the sudden change in his intention when he caught sight of the roans, which he (erroneously) believed were his noble mother's. He had a certain tact, however—the kind of tact which is one of the first results of good breeding; and, instead of betraying his

anxiety and causing Susie to share it, he generously gave her wisdom and discretion the credit of his change of intention, and she gloried in this subtle flattery.

When he turns off from the Strand she follows meekly in his wake, and as he walks along she rejoices in the opportunity of admiring his aristocratic back at her leisure. She fully appreciates the cut of his well-fitting coat, and she remarks the poise of his glossy dark head, on which the shining hat is set, as though the sleek chimneypot were the crown of his order. "How proud he looks! what a real swell he is!" thinks the poor little maid, and starts guiltily, as he suddenly turns and confronts her. Her timidity, her blushes, and her wistful glances are all accepted and appreciated as welcome homage to his powerful influence.

Boys, little and big, love to tyrannise, and are apt to take pleasure in the evidence of their superior strength.

"What do you say to a turn on the river, sweetheart?" he asks her presently. "We might have gone on into the Park, but there are sure to be crowds of people there whom we do not wish to see;" and noticing a mischievous twinkle

in her eyes, he adds, "nor to be seen by. Quite right, Miss Sharp; that was the thought in my mind."

She glances up into his face, with very evident satisfaction in her own. They have arrived at the end of a *cul-de-sac*. Walls are closing in about them, and no people, obnoxious or otherwise, are seeing or to be seen here. Looking into his "sweetheart's" flushed and happy face, Lord Kempton can scarcely resist the temptation suggested by her pretty pouting lips; but he is endeavouring to teach himself lessons of self-control, and practises the accomplishment, as he does all others which he considers "good form."

So he contents himself by taking her hands into his, and repeating his question: "Would you like to go on the river?"

"Oh, indeed I should, and above all things; but can you row, my dear lord?"

He laughs: "I'll show you some day; but we must go down into the country to Kingston or Taplow for that. Up here nothing more tempting than a river steamboat presents itself for our conveyance. Shall we go on to Greenwich, and get some dinner?"

"No, oh no!" exclaims Susie, startled. "I

must not, I dare not, stay. You know how vexed Gran is if I am not punctual; and I said I should be back at six o'clock without fail. I have to make tea for her and—and—a friend. They will be waiting for me."

"A friend?" repeats Kempton hastily, suspiciously.

To be jealous is not "good form;" and the young lord reproaches himself bitterly as soon as he has spoken. On no account shall Susie be allowed to perceive that he is capable of such *infra dig.* sentiments.

"You look confused and troubled, child; what makes you blush and hesitate in this extraordinary way? Tell me all about this mysterious friend?"

He has conquered his undue excitement, and is speaking in his coldest and most inquisitorial manner.

"Only the girl who is living with us," says Susie apologetically, and turns from red to white.

Determined not to betray his rising emotion, Lord Kempton is obliged to content himself with this unsatisfactory reply for the moment; but though he is silent for a time, he has by no means abandoned the subject.

"As this friend of yours shares your lodgings," he says at last, "she can prepare Madame Delane's tea for her, of course, and there is no necessity for you to hurry home. I do not intend you to go, in fact. You shall come to Battersea Park with me. We shall find chairs there, and we can sit and talk at our leisure. I will take care that you are back at the theatre in time for the evening performance."

Susie feels that he is angry. And in her sudden fear of having unconsciously offended him she forgets her great anxiety to hurry home to the exacting grandmother, who looks after the child very sharply, and insists upon an accurate account of every additional moment spent outside the four walls of the domicile, which the strict Frenchwoman considers as the only fitting *asile* for *une jeune fille bien élevée!* The liberty, the absence of surveillance enjoyed by English girls, shocks and alarms the old lady, who, if she were not too feeble to walk at all, would certainly accompany her unprotected grandchild on all her journeys to and from the theatre; for "the wolves do wait at the street-corners," she declares oracularly, "and young and innocent lambs are the victims they seek to devour."

Little Susie is almost as guileless as was the famous Red Ridinghood of nursery lore, and a designing wolf might find her tolerably easy prey if the bribe he used were labelled Love. But there is more of the eagle than the wolf in Alexander Kempton's nature, and evil designs he has none. He loves this gentle blue-eyed maiden, and he intends to guard the love she gives him jealously. It must be his entirely, and his alone. The bare suspicion that some friend of hers, some friend of whom he knew nothing, is waiting for her at home has made him quite sick.

"I suppose you do intend to come with me, Susie?" he says, piqued by her long silence. He speaks in his coldest and most dictatorial manner still. It is his father's manner; and the lad exults as he hears his own measured tones and sees the effect they produce on poor Susie.

So far he certainly has triumphed over any scruples she may have had, for she turns and meekly follows him down the sloping bridge, and on to the Temple pier.

What is she to say to her grandmother? How account for an absence as inexplicable to the old lady as it is unprecedented on her own part?

She dares not make any further appeal to her "dear lord," since the first mention of Gran and tea has so evidently annoyed him.

Why?

She ventures to glance at his dark quiet face now as he seats himself by her side. The big wheel of the steamer gives one hurried premonitory whirr. Then it settles methodically to its task of churning the water into foam and suds. And they are off.

He is bending over the side of the vessel, and looking down into the swiftly-moving river. He seems to have forgotten her presence altogether. She stifles an impatient sigh which rises to her lips, and tries to distract her own attention by watching a pair of lovers on the bench opposite. The lady is large of figure, and probably tall. Her face is red, and so are the huge roses in her small hat. Her hands are ungloved, and not very clean; but rings shine resplendent upon the fat fingers. Her hair is abundant, and of the artificial hue known as "ginger-gold." Her dress is of a bright-blue silk, and was originally made in an elaborately fashionable style; but now the flounces have parted from the skirt beneath, and here and there a rent in the silk affords glimpses

of some alien under-garment. Her mouth is wide and her laugh loud. But her companion evidently admires—perhaps he loves her. This is Susie's reflection as she watches the amorous glances cast upon this apparently unattractive female by the young man who is sitting so very close to her side. He has thrown one arm around her portly figure, and with his other hand lifts a large glass of foaming stout alternately to her lips and his own. They converse in whispers, and they laugh aloud; but they are entirely engrossed by one another. They are in love, and therefore happy, thinks Susie. Then she contrasts her own neat merino gown, her close-fitting black-straw hat, her dainty gloves and boots, with the tawdry finery of the woman opposite. And so far there is some comfort in the comparison; but the vulgar woman has a sympathetic friend, a loving lover, who understands and likes to talk to her, while she—Susie feels so lonely, so neglected, and her conscience is pricking her too, as she remembers her grandmother, and thinks of the terrible scolding which will await her on her return to-night. And for what has she risked all this unpleasantness? For the sake of a proud gentleman who turns away from her, and who, though they have passed

or stopped at half-a-dozen successive piers and landing-stages, has neither looked at nor addressed her. "That is because he is a lord," thinks Susie, and wishes she had done her duty, and gone straight home.

But Kempton's indifference is assumed only, and he is perfectly aware of the irritating effect it is producing upon his silent companion. Her sighs, the restless movements of her hands and feet, have not escaped him; but he is determined to ignore poor Susie's discomfort for the present. He has still so much of the boy under that mask of preternatural gravity that he rejoices in teasing others, more especially when he has been teased himself. And just now a far more important matter is at issue between them than one which could be described by so frivolous a word as teasing.

In truth the young man is suffering keenly. A tumult of jealous apprehension is raging within him, and all for her sake. Why, then, should she not be disturbed on his account?

He is at all times inclined to be suspicious. To-day he feels that he has real cause for his distrust, since Susie's extraordinary conduct, her change of colour, her uneasiness and hesitation,

have perplexed and amazed him. She has hitherto been so frank and straightforward in all she has said about her home-life and its simple surroundings, that there has been no possibility for distrust; but to-day——?

The men of Kempton's acquaintance, both old and young, are always talking about the frailty and deceitfulness of women, and the stories and personal experiences they relate go far to prove their condemnation as well deserved. As for the girls connected with the theatre, there can be but one opinion of them as a class, and it is certainly not a flattering one.

That *blasé* cousin of his, John Harford, holds the sex generally in the lightest possible estimation, and he has already had many a laugh at Kempton when the latter has vehemently declared that, whatever the rest of women might be, his Susie is certainly pure, honest, devoted, and true.

"Wait till you know her better," Harford once said. "It is only a question of time. You are bound to find her out sooner or later. Girls imbibe the power to deceive us with their mothers' milk. They cannot help it, my dear fellow. It is their nature to. I am quite willing to believe that your Susie is as good a girl as ever breathed;

but she is bound to have her little secrets, and I'm sure I don't know on what ground you consider yourself entitled to share them. You will surely prove yourself a fool for your pains if you flatter yourself that she gives you her undivided allegiance. She can't do it, my boy. She is bound to keep her eye on the main chance, just as you and I are, only rather more so, poor child. Take it which way you please, life must be a struggle for her, and a hard struggle too.

"If she has too much consideration for you to flirt under your eyes with another man, that proves her good feeling or her good sense; we won't dispute about terms, since the fact remains the same. But your assiduous devotion at the theatre does not prevent her from receiving a *bonâ-fide* lover at home—some Sam or Dick or Bill, a man of her own class, and who means business—marriage, that is.

"The old Frenchwoman will look after that, of course. Those *commères* are remarkably shrewd where a *dot* is concerned. Miss Susie's suitor—the one favoured by madame, I mean—is probably some twenty years older than your tender little dove. The Frenchwoman would consider such a one *rangé*, the wild-oats period left far

behind, and a comfortable balance at his banker's. Most likely he is a highly respectable, not too intelligent tradesman, who is like you in one respect only. He also is captivated by Miss Susie's baby-face and ingenuous prattle. He has taken care to satisfy himself as to her unblemished character; for when these middle-class chaps do choose their wives from the ballet, they are vastly more circumspect in their proceedings than one of us would be, *vide* the scandalous *mésalliances* perpetrated by rash members of the aristocracy.

"Well, our highly respectable Sam or Bill, having duly inquired into Miss Susie's mode of life, and knowing on how little she has contrived to exist at home, flatters himself that she will be content to administer his finances at the same ratio. In this he will, of course, find himself mistaken—as much mistaken as you are if you believe that, because you have not the *entrée* of Madame Delane's *salon*, other men are excluded also. You are a swell, dear boy. More ornamental than useful, thinks the shrewd madame. And as for Miss Vivian, she naturally admires you—*cela va sans dire*—and she knows that it redounds to her credit to have you always at her beck and call at the theatre. It gives her a

certain prestige among the fast set there. Of course, she likes to boast of the devotion of so exemplary a lover, who contents himself with the privilege of chaperoning her through the streets, and who, as she takes good care to tell everyone, is not allowed to cross the threshold of the grand-maternal mansion. Don't be hard on the little girl, Kempton; but don't let her make a fool of you."

Such was the gist of John Harford's comments on the subject of Susie, which was an all-engrossing one to his youthful cousin.

What further advice, examples, jokes, and innuendoes were bestowed upon Lord Kempton, *à propos* of his well-known *amourette*, it is needless to chronicle at greater length.

The young aristocrat's natural caution, and the fear of ridicule from his elders, prevented his making the startling retort, which must certainly have silenced his officious friends. He did not solemnly announce the fact that he intended to make Susie Delane his wife; but such was his determination. She was his first love. There was a certain secrecy and mystery about their original meeting and subsequent interviews, which encouraged the spirit of chivalry and romance in

his breast. However aged a lad of twenty-one may have taught himself to appear, he is bound to feel some youthful emotions in regard to the woman who has made his pulses throb with quickened life, and taught him the true meaning of that omnipotent word LOVE, which he reads in her eyes for the first time.

Such had hitherto been the state of Lord Kempton's feeling toward Susie, and he had secretly revelled in it. His passion was becoming more and more absorbing as her ingenuous candour and sweet disposition were more plainly revealed to him. Only into her pretty pink ear, and that very rarely, has he allowed himself to whisper the fond and admiring thoughts she has awakened within him. And he has believed as implicitly in her loyalty to him as he has proved himself true to her.

But to-day a miserable doubt is harassing him. She is concealing something; there is some mystery about this secret visitor, this sudden insistence on the necessity of returning home so hurriedly. Susie is certainly not as frank as usual. *Ergo* she must have something to conceal.

And he must call his pride to his aid. He must not allow himself to betray what, or how

much, he is feeling on her account; but he must lead her—who is always so easily led—to betray herself and her secret, whatever it is.

As he sits by her side on the river steamer he is mentally passing their brief acquaintance in review. He remembers every incident of their various hurried meetings; he remembers all Susie has ever told him about her home and her grandmother, and how persistently his desire to enter the old house in Soho has been denied him. Then he recalls, with all the accuracy of a man bent on self-torment, each word of warning, each doubt and taunt and sarcasm so persistently uttered by his experienced cousin and other would-be counsellors. And by the sudden and unexpected light of Susie's apparent duplicity, that rival of his, the Sam, or Dick, or Bill so often vaguely hinted at, assumes a tangible form in Lord Kempton's excited imagination.

Yes; one thing is absolutely necessary in this crisis. He must, he will, keep cool. Patience and seeming indifference will surely win the day, and then Susie must be brought to book.

"Are you enjoying this, Susie?" he asks, when he has resolved on the most politic course of action. "The air is fresh and pleasant. It is

surely far more agreeable to be here than in the crowded streets; don't you think so?"

Susie starts when first he addresses her. She had given up all hopes of a word from him long ago, and had endeavoured to concentrate her attention on that very demonstrative couple opposite. Now her dear lord's voice falls upon her ear, she turns to him with a bright and grateful smile. He speaks in his usual calm tone, and that is always reassuring; but she misses a certain tender vibration in it which she has learnt to expect whenever he addresses her. She is only an ignorant ballet-dancer; but she is also a loving woman, and her heart teaches her to appreciate what her intellect cannot define. Why is he changed to-day? What has she done to merit his evident coldness? But no sooner has she asked this perplexing question than she takes herself sharply to task for being fanciful and exacting. Trouble awaits her at home, of course; then why not profit to the utmost by the delight, for the sake of which Gran's terrible anger will have to be braved anon?

"I think it is most delightful to be on the river, and—with you," she says, in her simple earnest way.

And if he chose to look into her loving blue eyes at this moment, his absurd suspicions would vanish as readily as they arose; but he does not look into her face at all. He knows his own weakness, and wishes to prove his strength.

She tells him of her observation of the lovers opposite, and he tries to laugh, as she does, at their very demonstrative attentions to one another and the lately replenished glass. But the incongruity of his surroundings suddenly fills him with a keen sense of disgust.

"What horrible people I have brought you among, my poor little girl!" he says, as the steamer comes to a standstill. "Thank Heaven we land here," he adds fervently; and drawing her little hand into his arm, they walk on shore together.

* * * * *

When they are seated side by side in Battersea Park, a clear level of trim-cut grass and no human being in sight:

"I want you to tell me all about this visitor of yours, Susie," he says, idly tapping his foot with his cane, and watching her from under the brim of his hat, which he has carefully tilted over his eyes, as though to shade them from the sun,

which has sunk towards the horizon by this time. "I think you said she is living with you. How is it I have never heard of her before?"

Susie is silent.

My suspicions were well founded, he thinks, and continues to tap his boot.

"Has your lodger been with you long?" he asks presently.

"No, not long," says Susie; and, pointing across the level grass: "Are those men playing cricket over there?" she asks.

"Most likely," says he; "but never mind about other people now, Susie; I am very much interested in this—this lodger of yours, and I particularly desire to know all about her—all. Do you understand?" He speaks with marked deliberation, with much emphasis.

"I am so sorry, my dear lord," says Susie, with so intense a blush that her eyes fill with tears, "so very, very sorry; but I am forbidden to tell you anything at all about our visitor—indeed, I had faithfully promised not to mention a word to anyone. I feel I have done very wrong to say even this much. Pray do not ask me any more questions, it is so hard not to answer you; but I

am sure you would not wish me to break my promise, even for your sake, would you?"

The tears that first came with her blushes are rolling over her cheeks now. He is turning impatiently away, and she is laying an entreating hand upon his arm.

"Pray don't be vexed with me, my dear, dear lord," she pleads. "Indeed it is dreadful not to be able to tell you the whole truth, but—I am forbidden."

"By whom?" says he promptly.

"By both. Gran, and she — our visitor also——"

"Save yourself a repetition of the lie," *he* interrupts her roughly. "I know it is *he*, and not she, quite as well as you do. You are very clever, Miss Delane, but not quite clever enough to deceive me. I will not detain you any longer. Go home to your grandmother and to *him*, and pardon me for the delay I have caused."

He springs to his feet, and walks rapidly away westwards.

Susie watches his retreating figure, and when he has passed out of sight she continues to sit in her chair in silent helpless amazement.

Only when she realises that the sun is setting

does she remember where she is, and how far she has to go before she can arrive at the theatre. She hurries to the landing-stage, finds that she has some coppers in her purse (which is fortunate, she thinks gratefully), takes a ticket, and is herself taken citywards by the steamer. Within the hour she stands upon the stage at the Kaleidoscope, clad in her dainty shepherdess costume, and wears a smile, as she does her dress, to please the public and to satisfy her paymaster, who would show scant pity for a girl who did not even take the trouble to look her best while she is on his stage.

With all her efforts to appear light-hearted, poor Susie is not very successful to-night; and Mr. Hoaks, having his attention called to the fact that Miss Delane is commencing to give herself airs, now addresses a reprimand to the culprit, which might be construed into a menace.

"Pray forgive me just this once, Mr. Hoaks," says Susie pleadingly. "I am not quite well to-night; but indeed I will never be careless again."

"You're fretting, my dear," he replies, in a kinder tone; "you've been bullied by that sulky-looking young lord, and as you're a little fool, you haven't the spirit to pay him back in his own

coin. There are more ways than one in which a girl can hold her own and her lover too. You just mark my words. Don't you be so very meek with that young swell. Next time he wants to play the tyrant, you just do a bit of the shrew on your own account. Depend upon it, that is the way girls get on so fast in this give-and-take world. Pluck up your spirit, child, and don't allow yourself to be sat upon. You're far too pretty for that. Why, only this morning, at the first performance, Sir Danby Brough asked leave to—— There, don't look frightened, my dear—— there's no harm done; but let one thing be distinctly understood between us: there must be no fretting, Miss Vivian—none, do you hear? Tears play the devil with women's looks, and their temper too. You're doing very well just now, and have given me great satisfaction; indeed I have been thinking of a little rise for you in the direction of the treasury. Ah, I thought that prospect would bring the smiles back. There, run along, my dear, and don't you be too meek. It's bad policy, and it never pays, either in the theatre or out of it."

After such unwonted encouragement from her manager, Susie certainly did brighten up; and

when she left the stage-door she tried hard to walk bravely forth, looking neither to the right nor the left, and assuring herself eagerly that she was not a bit disappointed by *his* absence—no, not a little bit.

Madame Delane scolded at length, and with solemn severity, when Miss Susie returned home at midnight. But Susie cared very little about either the scolding or the reproaches she was forced to listen to.

How could she really mind anything that was said and done by others since he had left her—left her in unreasoning and unaccountable anger—left her, and broken her heart!

So the poor child told herself when she laid her head on her pillow, and wetted it with the first bitter tears she had ever shed.

* * * * *

A fortnight passed by—a whole fortnight—during which she never once saw her “dear lord.”

He did not appear at the theatre, either in front or behind the scenes, and poor Susie felt that the first bright page in the short story of her simple life had been torn asunder by a ruthless

hand. No further glimpse of happiness could ever be hers, of course.

Lord Kempton, meanwhile, was chewing the cud of bitter resentment in sullen but dignified silence.

No one should know of his discomfiture. None of his officious friends and advisers should have the satisfaction of crowing over the misfortune they had sneeringly predicted. And before all others must Harford be kept in ignorance of the altered state of affairs. To Maurice Steele the unfortunate young man might have spoken frankly, had chance thrown them together at this time. But Maurice was fully occupied in conducting a very important correspondence on behalf of his brother Harold, and also in arranging all his London affairs prior to his departure for that long-projected visit to Devonshire with a reading-party.

Susie, overwhelmed as she was by doubts and difficulties, poor child, often and gratefully thought of that kind considerate friend of her "dear lord's," who had spoken so pleasantly to her in the wings of the theatre, and whose gravely courteous manner invited, even as it inspired, confidence. She would much like to have gone

to ask him for his advice, possibly for his mediation, in this sudden and still incomprehensible trouble of hers; but she did not know where to find him. She even took courage one day to ask one of the men employed at the theatre to look out Mr. Steele's address for her in the "Directory."

"What's his christian-name?" asked the man civilly enough; but finding that Miss Delane was ignorant even of what he called the letter, he at once informed her that his search would be useless, for there were sure to be dozens of Steeles in London.

So poor Susie reluctantly abandoned even that forlorn hope. It had been but a faint one, and it was—her last. Failing the mediation of Mr. Steele, she felt she must resign herself to a prolonged estrangement from the man whom she adored, and whom she had unwittingly offended past forgiveness.

Just at this time that mysterious visitor of Susie's, who had already been the innocent cause of so much trouble, heard the girl speak of Mr. Steele, whom she mentioned as a particular friend of Lord Kempton's.

"Never on any account have anything to do

with any person of the name of Steele," said the visitor, with startling solemnity.

This warning so painfully impressed Susie, that a few days after, when she caught sight of Mr. Steele in the street, she swiftly turned a corner and ran down a lane to avoid meeting him face to face.

"Maud knows him better than I do," she thought, "and Maud told me on no account to have anything to do with him."

How often, in the thick of life, we rub clothes with a Fate that hurries past!

CHAPTER XI.

LITERA SCRIPTA MANET.

Backward yearnings are but idle.

HAROLD had settled down to his new duties at Portsmouth, not cheerfully, perhaps; but certainly with an earnest determination to devote himself conscientiously to their fulfilment.

Maurice proved most considerate to the unfortunate exile, writing to him regularly, and supplying him, as far as he was able, with entertaining news. Harold felt grateful for his brother's

thoughtful kindness; but letters which contained no information about the one all-engrossing theme in which his interest was concentrated, could not give the unhappy youth much satisfaction.

At last the news came that Maurice had ascertained Hetheringham's address, and written to him; and now Harold's life was filled with a new fever of impatience.

When would further news arrive?

Twice he telegraphed to Maurice, and prepaid the reply: "Have you heard from Italy?" And the answer each time was: "Not yet; will write."

This was by no means encouraging, and Harold's restless spirit was chafed almost beyond endurance.

What were his thoughts all this time? Did doubt of Clare or jealousy of the successful artist harass him? Neither.

Loyal by nature, loving and trusting, without a shadow of suspicion in his mind, he waited on; not patiently, by reason of his rash impulsive temperament, but hopefully, and knowing no distrust.

He understood Clare better than anyone else did. When he placed that ring on her finger, on which "*For ever*" was graven, he felt as sure as

she did that time would prove the truth of those prophetic words.

It was not doubt, it was longing and impatience, which tormented him. At the Academy, on that most memorable day, it had seemed as though the cup was being held to his parched lips; and at the very moment of the allaying of his protracted agony the blessed draught of comfort was suddenly removed and borne afar again.

Harold felt that Fate was cruel; but Clare, his Clare, if only he could find her, must ever be kind. In this misery of waiting, waiting, which truly is one of the hardest trials we any of us have to endure, some weeks passed by; and a whole month had actually elapsed since Harold left town before he really received the precious eagerly-expected envelope, containing three letters of such vital import to him.

He read them all with a rapt attention, with an oft-changing colour, and with many an exclamation; the "Ah!" of amazement or consternation alternating with the "Oh!" of defiance or disgust.

These were the letters:

“King Street, S.W. : June 1st.

“MY DEAR HAROLD,

“Enclosed please find copies of the letters which have passed between Hetheringham and myself. Read and judge all he says for yourself. There is some mystery about Clare, as you see. ‘On a woman’s name a mystery is a stain.’

“The fact of there being any secret between such a man as Percy Hetheringham and a young and beautiful girl like Clare is not reassuring.

“Facts are stubborn things, as I have so often tried to teach you. I will abstain from further comment on the contents of the letter; but it is some satisfaction to me to be able to assure you, and most positively, that you will now get over this infatuation. You will indeed; though at this moment you hate me for even suggesting such a possibility. All honest true-hearted men (and you are one) get over unworthy loves.”

(The nature of Harold’s exclamation, as he read this assertion, may be imagined.)

“Nothing is more detrimental to life and character than affection devoid of faith in its object.

"Let me entreat you to pluck up your courage, and to show the spirit that is in you. Apply for foreign service, and accept the first offer you can get to go abroad. I do not suggest this because I differ from the classic who declares, '*Cælum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt*,' but because the change will give you more work; and that is what you really want now.

"You must double down this page in your life, as many a better man than either you or I has had to do before.

"The worst of an unworthy love, wilfully persisted in, is that it has power to disturb all one's views of life, and even to blight a career auspiciously begun.

"What I tell you I have seen exemplified. I do not speak from hearsay." ("But very like a fractious old woman," commented Harold bitterly.) "Write to me soon, my dear boy, and let me know that you have chosen the right way out of your difficulties. I start for Exeter to-morrow, but must find myself in Cambridge by the end of this month.

"Your affectionate Brother,

"MAURICE STEELE."

“King Street, S.W.: May 15th.

“DEAR MR. HETHERINGHAM,

“I am sorry to trouble you during your hardly and well-earned holiday; but I am desirous of obtaining some information, which you, and you only, can give me. I am most anxious to learn all you can tell me respecting the model who stood for your ‘Maud Muller.’ It is not curiosity that prompts me to ask. It is absolutely necessary that I should ascertain the present whereabouts of the lady in question. You will pardon my urgency when I tell you that the happiness of one very near and dear to me is at stake.

“I cannot close this letter without offering you my sincere congratulations on the excellence of the pictures you have exhibited this year. ‘Maud Muller’ must make an indelible impression on all who see her. With renewed apologies for trespassing upon your time,

“I remain yours truly,

“MAURICE STEELE.

“To Percy Hetheringham, Esq., Sorrento.”

“Villa Bellosguardo, Sorrento: May 25th.

“MY DEAR STEELE,

“No apologies necessary, I assure you. I went over to Naples for a week; hence my delay in answering your letter. I sincerely wish it lay in my power to give you the particulars you require. But—promises to women are debts of honour, you know—and are ‘paid before taxes.’

“I have pledged myself to observe strict secrecy respecting the beautiful model to whom, I own, I am indebted for the success of my principal picture. Of the lady’s present whereabouts I can tell you nothing, as I have not the least idea what has become of her. You cannot be more anxious to ascertain that point than I am myself. For both our sakes, I trust your inquiries may prove successful.

“Over the past she herself has drawn the veil.

“This is an earthly paradise, though getting more than terrestrially warm at present. Do you know it? But of course you do, since you made the *tour du monde* with that precocious pupil of yours.

“Next week I go on to the Ionian Isles, to fulfil an engagement with a yachting friend, who,

I believe, purposes to take me on a voyage of discovery. I wonder whether we shall be devoured by cannibals or drowned, or simply return to London and civilisation? If the latter prove the satisfactory *dénouement* of our enterprise, I shall certainly come and report myself at Hyde House.—With kind regards to yourself, and that delightful young ancient, Lord Kempton, believe me to remain yours very sincerely,

“PERCY HETHERINGHAM.

“N.B. not, P.S.—Pray abstain from mentioning my name to his youthful lordship at all. It must be obnoxious to him, since it is evidently on *his* account you are making these ‘private inquiries.’ Are you aware that we (he and I) have had a most polite and exhaustive correspondence *à propos* of a certain replica? I little dreamed, while reading and answering his business-like epistles, that his peace of mind had been upset by the lovely and most mysterious ‘Maud.’ Indeed, I am agreeably disappointed to find that a real heart beats under so truly Chesterfieldian an exterior.”

* * * * *

Harold's first impulse, after the perusal of

Hetheringham's "plausible" letter, was to start for Sorrento instantly, to meet that vile coward (thus he dubbed him with many unparliamentary addendas) face to face, to ask him to explain, to apologise, or——

At this climax of his fast-rising wrath Harold paused. The word ringing in his ears, and driving all reasoning power before it, was—"satisfaction."

But satisfaction, in this case, meant duelling. And Englishmen do not fight duels.

Night brings counsel.

With the first gleam of morning light, Harold had subdued his thirst for blood. And as many a wiser man has done before him, he endeavours to assuage his wrath by the spilling of a darker fluid. He has recourse to ink.

It is only when he has completed the draft of the letter which is intended to carry battle, murder, and sudden death between the lines, that he is startled by the remembrance that Hetheringham is going to leave Italy within this week. His letter was written on the 25th of May. This is already the 2nd of June. There is not a moment to lose.

A telegram!

Brilliant idea; that must catch him, and at once—catch him at once; besides, condensation means strength; or is it concentration?

“Either will do. Words become unimportant when deeds are imminent. What most recommends this telegraphic scheme is the rapidity with which it can be carried out.

Gedacht: gethan.

And while it is being done, Harold's thoughts wander away, and lose themselves in incongruous comparisons. This irrelevancy is inseparable from an overwrought state of mind. He remembers Liebig's extract. Then advertisements of condensed milk occur to him; but at length the whole question is set at rest, as he actually writes out the aggressive telegram.

“Foreign, sir? Then both addresses must be paid for,” says the clerk.

There are over thirty words besides, Harold finds on counting them; that will cost a considerable number of shillings, and shillings are scarce in the impecunious sailor's pocket. But what a relief to let that cad Hetheringham “have it!” That alone is worth any money—any sacrifice.

This is the telegram:

"Seen frivolous reply to Maurice on questions of vital importance to me. The lady-model will be my wife. Remember that in future. Send answers to questions asked at once, or I will wring them from you. Reply paid."

At midnight the reply is brought to Harold in these words:

"Only knave or fool would suggest possibility of breaking word to lady."

"He is right," thinks Harold ruefully. "He is quite right. And I have thoroughly deserved this reproof. But I am neither knave nor fool; and I love my Clare, as I trust her, for ever!"

Maurice, in due course, received copies of both telegrams from Portsmouth. His stock of patience was well-nigh exhausted. And he felt powerless, indeed, since reckless Hal had chosen to expose his dubious hand to so clever and experienced an adversary as Percy Hetheringham.

From the wings the play at love, and for love, seemed more and more complicated and

unsatisfactory, and Maurice began to have more faith in the ultimate and legitimate success of Kempton, who appeared to act with forethought, skill, and method, than Harold ever could inspire with his blind passion and absurd belief in Hetheringham's model.

A distrustful silence fell between the brothers now. Maurice left London, and Harold remained in Portsmouth. The one was indifferent, the other still hopeful, and each, of course, bound to bide his time.

CHAPTER XII.

HOMELESS.

A cry that went up single, echoless:
My God, I am forsaken!

WHAT had become of Clare?

It is time that this haunting question, which puzzled and perplexed poor Harold Steele, leaving him no rest or peace, should at length be fully answered for the reader's benefit.

Chill without and chill within was that ill-fated gusty October day on which Lord Verstrume paid his last and memorable visit to Hyde Park Place.

From the time of his lordship's first introduction to Mrs. Steele's domestic circle, that lady conceived and entertained ambitious hopes for her dear Cecilia's ultimate promotion in the social scale, by dint of her marriage with the noble lord with whom "the child" had become acquainted on the occasion of her *début* at a subscription-ball at Willis's Rooms. The *raison d'être* for the ball was a charity. The tickets were sold at the uniform price of a guinea, and were to be obtained from lady patronesses only.

This was supposed to insure the elevated social status of the purchasers. Mrs. Steele volunteered to become responsible for the sale of twenty-four tickets, and was consequently requested to have her name printed among the list of patronesses.

Lord Verstrume applied to her for six tickets. He drove to Hyde Park Place in his elegantly-appointed brougham, and made the application in person.

Mrs. Steele received her distinguished visitor with flattering *empressement*, and hastily summoned her dear Cecilia, whom she "longed to present to his lordship."

His lordship was more than gracious; he

bowed and paid fulsome compliments, with what Mrs. Steele deemed a true courtier's powers of fascination.

Poor lady! What could she know of courts or courtiers?

Being told that Miss Steele was about to make her *début* in the world of fashion, on the occasion of the ball for which he had just purchased tickets, Lord Verstrume immediately requested that radiant young lady to reserve two dances for him. She consented with very evident delight; and Mrs. Steele from this moment began to indulge in glorious visions, in which her Cissy figured conspicuously as "my lady."

Lord Verstrume was old, and he was ugly—a leering satyr, as Maurice had said; but he was a lord, a bachelor, and rich.

What fault can be found with a man who possesses a title and thirty thousand a year? He had heard something relative to this household in Hyde Park Place which made him desire to ingratiate himself there. He was a cunning old man, and a cautious one, and felt his way to the end he had in view with considerable skill.

"The fame of your daughter's charms has been trumpeted abroad, my dear madam," he

said, with what he intended as an appreciative smile; "but I thought I had heard of two young ladies. Will you not allow me, like Paris of old, to see the three Graces together?" He bowed to his delighted hostess, who fully appreciated his gallantry, and thought him the most charming, the most polished of men—and lords.

"But Amy is only a baby," she cried deprecatingly; "she is still in the school-room, at work with her governess."

"I love babies," replied his lordship, smiling sweetly; "but suppose I must not interfere with lessons. Still I am most anxious to make the acquaintance of every member of your family, my dear Mrs. Steele; and as I presume there is a gathering of the clan at luncheon-time, I feel almost tempted to make so bold as to crave permission to remain, a privileged guest, at your hospitable board."

How charming he was! What affability, what condescension! Inviting himself to luncheon too, a request Mrs. Steele could really never have summoned sufficient courage to prefer to a stranger—to a lord!

He did remain to luncheon. He saw and kissed "sweet Amy." He said she was the baby

rosebud blushing on the parent stem. And he glanced at the tall handsome girl who accompanied Amy, and to whom he was not presented. Taking his cue from his hostess, he apparently ignored the governess, silent beautiful Clare. But he heartily congratulated himself on the success of his errand. The game was well worth the candle. Before he took any active part in it, however, he must become a little better acquainted with the cards held by his probable opponents, Cecilia and her mother, and by his wholly unconscious partner, the modest unresponsive young governess.

Encouraged by the beaming smiles of Cecilia, and fortified by several glasses of Mr. Steele's excellent old port, his lordship suddenly resolved on leading a trump-card.

"I am going to ask you a favour, my dear Mrs. Steele," he said. "Let me have the privilege of presenting a couple of ball-tickets to my sweet little Amy and Miss——? Then we shall be quite a happy family-party."

"Tickets for our ball to a child and her nursery-governess? Certainly not, my dear lord—most certainly not. Amy is far too young, of

course, and—and, in fact, it is quite out of the question.”

This with indignation.

“Do not let us look upon the *réunion* as a ball, my dear madam,” pleaded his lordship. Resistance always goaded him on to persevere in any course he had adopted. “Let us rather regard it as a work of kindness and Christian charity only. No one can be too young or too—humble” (this was understood as intended for Clare) “to aid in so noble an enterprise.”

But Mrs. Steele was obdurate; and Lord Verstrume felt he had forced his trumps too soon. No matter how promising his hand, he must play his cards more warily in future, and reserve his strength.

Such a glorious “odd trick” as this charming young governess was well worth waiting for. He could afford to watch and bide his time. To facilitate matters, he commenced to pay the most assiduous court to happy Cecilia. Thus he secured a constant welcome for himself in Hyde Park Place, and he determined to ignore the occasional appearance of Clare as rudely as Mrs. Steele herself could desire.

This in the house.

But out of it, he soon contrived to arrange surreptitious meetings with the young "nursery-governess" and her charge. He discovered the hour and the direction of their matutinal walks, and either waylaid or followed them, with the very unsatisfactory results so elaborately described by Mrs. Steele to Maurice in a previous chapter.

At last that terrible hour arrived when his lordship, carried away by his infatuation, maddened by baffled passion, became utterly reckless of consequences, and stealthily entered the little room on the landing, where he knew Clare was wont to pass her time, working for her exacting mistress.

He had vainly entreated for "just one kiss" during many weeks past. He had offered the young girl money. He had sought to bribe her with the promise of unlimited banknotes, of splendid jewellery, and very fine clothes. She had steadily and persistently repulsed him, and of late had even ceased to appear in Kensington Gardens, intent on those matutinal walks which gave Lord Verstrume his only conversational opportunities.

But his lordship was not apt to be foiled in any enterprise on which he had set his heart (?).

What she would not give, he must contrive to take.

So he surprised her as she sat alone at her work. And when she started up, amazed and indignant at this intrusion, he clasped her in his arms and strove to kiss her lips.

Outraged and terrified, poor Clare rushed to the door and cried for help.

Mrs. Steele has already explained the result of the girl's appeal, and the bitter expressions of that lady's virtuous indignation need not be recapitulated here.

Suffice it to say that Clare, instead of help and sympathy, received only harshest condemnation. She was told that the hateful attentions of Lord Verstrume, which had of late amounted to systematic persecution, were the consequences of her own brazen effrontery; and she heard, with mingled horror and dismay, that she herself was entirely to blame for what she was pleased to call the insult put upon her this day.

Mrs. Steele wound up her tirade of abuse by telling Clare that she could no longer be considered a fit associate for such delicately-nurtured and highly-refined ladies as the Misses Steele, but that an effort should be made to get her into a

religious HOME. There, under the constant supervision and with the guidance of holy sisters, it was probable she might soon realise the enormity of her offences, and be brought into a proper state of repentance for her sin.

"You mean a penitentiary!" cried Clare, her beautiful eyes flashing, her lips and her clenched hands trembling, in a very agony of passionate revolt.

"You may call the Christian home, which I most considerately suggest to you, by any name you please, Miss Redmond. Your insolence does not alter the kindness of my intention."

Thus, with the frigid serenity of conscious rectitude, spoke Mrs. Steele.

Red wrath and shrill remonstrance never became her; indeed, she was apt to appear ridiculous when angry. But to-day she was moved beyond her wont, and she turned pale. Her speech was not turbulent, but measured and incisive.

Clare listened with bated breath and a failing heart. Never had she known Mrs. Steele so impressive. She actually began to doubt her own innocence, seeing this stern white woman so thoroughly persuaded of her guilt.

Viewing the "situation" from a dramatic

standpoint, it certainly was a pity that Mrs. Steele marred the success of her dignified "entry" by a lapse into the old familiar nagging tone. She could not resist another cutting allusion to the sinful levity which lured Lord Verstrume into publicly compromising Clare and himself before the amazed eyes of the virtuous parent of those poor innocent darlings Cecilia and Amalia.

It was after this parting thrust that Clare (according to Mrs. Steele's account) became insolent, and received notice to quit at the end of a week.

Having thus brought matters to the climax she had striven for, ever since her dear Harold's departure, Mrs. Steele and her eldest daughter went off to a dinner-party.

Miss Cecilia naturally felt much aggrieved. Her rising hopes of personal aggrandisement had just received a very rude check; but it was some consolation to remember that all the blame rested on the shoulders of that wicked, forward Clare. And further comfort was to be had in the certainty of the iniquitous governess's speedy dismissal from Hyde Park Place.

All the fault was on Clare's side, of course. His lordship had only proved weak and thought-

less, as all men are apt to be when unduly tempted by—designing women.

Mr. Steele, who, as usual, was completely ignorant of any domestic disturbance, took his pet Amy off to the theatre, as he had previously volunteered to do, and thus Clare's only chance of redress was lost to her.

She had already made up her mind to put her case calmly and truthfully to Harold's father, and only remembered when Amy came up to bid her a hurried good-night that she would be left quite alone this evening.

Alone with her grief and the crushing sense of her bitter humiliation.

"Oh Harold, my darling, my darling, my own true love; if you could only know, if you could see how wretched, how helpless, how miserable I am!" sobbed the poor girl, as she flung herself on the bed in her little room, and found some relief for her intolerable suffering in a flood of passionate tears. "Oh Harold, why don't you come home? Why are you not here to save and deliver me?"

Idle questions, vain imaginings. Harold was over a thousand miles away, sailing on the Pacific. Spring sunshine overhead, spring sunshine in his

heart, as he thought of the time coming nearer and nearer when he should meet his true love again.

Little recked he that chill autumn winds were blowing about the parental home in London, and that his unhappy love was crying to him for help and comfort in the bitter hour of her utter desolation.

Mrs. Steele had been very careful to conceal the sailor's whereabouts, his prospects, his future destination, and imminent return from Clare. Indeed, she had shown a jealous persistency in her reticence as to her son's affairs, which was worthy of a better cause.

He, for his part, had faithfully kept the promise so reluctantly made. He had never written a letter to Clare; but had consoled himself for this hardship by interspersing his epistles to his mother with exhaustive messages to his betrothed.

Needless to state that not one of those words of love and encouragement were ever repeated to her, for whom they were all intended. But with a refinement of cruelty of which only women seem capable, his "complete silence" on the subject of Clare was frequently commented on

by Mrs. Steele and her amiable daughter in the governess's presence.

"It does seem extraordinary that he has so entirely forgotten her," said Mrs. Steele; and Cecilia replied, "His love was only boyish folly from first to last, of course."

Clare heard and heeded every one of those treacherous comments; but the memory of her lover's last embrace, the sight of the ring he had then given her, had never failed to reassure her as yet.

To-night, however, when the misery of her existence in the house of Harold's parents had come to a climax, all the hard things she had heard recurred to her, and she herself began to believe what others had so persistently endeavoured to teach her.

Her lover must have forgotten her. If that were not the case, she surely should not suffer as she was suffering now. When she had come to this distressing conclusion, she passionately pressed her lips upon that ring, his parting gift, and wondered if it were true that men were never faithful to their vows, and that only to women it is given to love for ever.

Ah, surely, surely Harold was an exception to

that condemning rule of fickleness! He had been, he still was, loyal and true. If only she might look into his loving eyes once more, and hear the welcome tones of his encouraging voice! Then all her doubts and fears would vanish as mists before the clear light of the rising sun.

“Ah, Harold, Harold!”

She cried his name aloud again, as though he must hear her appeal at last. And then she became more tranquil, and began to reason.

He had been away so long now, his return surely could not be very far off. Any day might bring him back—to-night, to-morrow. He had said, with his happy laugh, “I shall turn up one fine morning when you least expect me.”

Should she summon her courage to her aid and endeavour to endure with patience a little longer—until he really came home to her—at last?

But suddenly the threat of the penitentiary sounded in her ears with deafening iteration, and she remembered, with a rousing start, that she had received notice to quit at the end of a week. She was to be turned out—to be sent forth into the wilderness of this great mysterious London, the wickedness of which formed the staple of con-

versation above stairs and below—she was to seek a new mode of existence for herself, and the door of Harold's home would be closed to her for ever.

That was the gruesome aspect of affairs as regarded the future; but worse even than that were the present anxieties pressing upon her—fear of Mrs. Steele and the threatened penitentiary, horror and loathing of further attentions from that odious Lord Verstrume—Oh, it was hard, too hard, to be borne!

She sprang to her feet to escape from her maddening thoughts in hurried movement, and she paced restlessly to and fro. Suddenly a mode of escape occurred to her, the only way possible out of all the difficulties surrounding and threatening her. She must run away—run away and hide herself so effectually that neither Mrs. Steele nor his lordship could ever find her again.

Sooner or later she would have to face the world. It was surely wiser and better to do so now, while she had power to act after her own free-will, than to await the hour when it should suit her hard-hearted mistress to bid her go.

Clare has a will of her own, and, having made a resolution, feels herself thoroughly able to carry

it out at all hazards. There must be an end to regret and further hesitation at once. Half the difficulties of life shrink away from a fearless and resolute encounter. That was one of the "golden maxims" impressed upon her by the kind eccentric old tutor who had lodged in her father's house, and had taught her, as well as Harold, so kindly, so patiently, so well.

If he were alive she could go straight to him now and ask for shelter, help, comfort, and advice; but he is dead, alas! and she had not even been allowed to go and nurse him in his mortal sickness, as he had begged her to do. Mrs. Steele had harshly refused her petition for one week's absence—another grievance against Mrs. Steele, the sudden remembrance of which fires Clare's blood.

She starts to her feet, and resolves to pack up at once.

In the course of years she has managed to change the bare attic set apart for her use into a dainty bower. She has knitted curtains for the bed and the window, and has looped them up with knots of pretty ribbon. She has skilfully concealed the sharp outline of deal table, chairs, and chest of drawers by covers of patch or crewel

work. She has repapered the ugly walls with "supplements" and other illustrations, many of them coloured by herself. Amy, who is really still a child, and not a badly-disposed one, has contributed all sorts of pictures and "pretties" for decorative purposes, and has frequently elected to assist Clare in the arrangement of her little room. As Clare looks around it now she remembers Amy's occasional attentions gratefully. There has been so little else than hardship in her life at Hyde Park Place that every glimpse of pleasantness has made a lasting impression; therefore she takes Amy's photograph down from the wall. "That shall go with me," she decides.

She possesses a small leather travelling-bag, a parting gift of the old schoolmaster's. That will hold all that it is necessary for her to take away, all that she has the right to consider her own. First of all, her books. The collection is a small and a very odd one. Longfellow's "Poems," "Queechy," Emerson's "Representative Men," a Latin Grammar, Mangnall's "Questions," a Church Service, and a spelling dictionary. These are carefully bestowed in the bag; then follow her linen, designs and materials for work, a small tin paint-box and a housewife—very precious this,

for it was Harold's first gift in the old Torchester days. His picture in its neat leather-case, and the purse containing all her savings, she carefully hides in the bosom of her plain black gown; and now—she is ready.

The bag, though small, is heavy; but her heart is lighter already. She will bear the yoke of slavery no longer. She is all alone in the world, homeless, forsaken, but—free.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADRIFT.

Then black despair,
The shadow of a starless night, was thrown
Over the world in which I moved alone.

CLARE does not pause now. Her preparations are complete. She has knelt beside her bed for a moment and has breathed a hurried but a fervent prayer for help and guidance in the strange life of adventure on which she is about to embark. She prays that she may be forgiven if she is doing wrong. She prays that she may ever be true to her darling, and that they may meet again, if not in this world, then in the next.

It is a childlike prayer, and is uttered in the spirit of a simple childlike faith. It has certainly fortified her who utters it; and she moves to the door with firm unhesitating steps. Her long dark water-proof completely envelops her figure, a close black bonnet and a thick veil cover her head and face. She pauses for a moment on the landing. It is nine o'clock—the hour for the servants' supper. They are not likely to be moving about at so important a moment.

On the stairs she pauses again—shall she go out at the hall-door, or creep farther down and escape through the area?

No; she dares not pass the servants'-hall, they might hear her; and question or delay at this moment would utterly unfit her for the task she has set herself.

So she glides swiftly and noiselessly down the front stairs, crosses over the tessellated pavement of the hall, approaches the door, and finds, with a sigh of relief, that it is not bolted; but left on the latch ready for Mr. Steele's key, when Amy and he return.

Where will she be by that time?

A moment later she is outside the door, standing upon the step in new perplexity. If she pulls

the door to after her, the servants must hear, and will come up to see what has happened. This is a risk she dares not run; so she chooses the lesser of two evils, and makes her escape while she can, leaving the house to take care of itself, with its door ajar.

She runs down the steps, and hurries along the pavement; in her excitement she cannons against the postman; but he is too busy sorting letters, by the feeble gleam of his bull's-eye, to heed her at all.

"He will give the alarm when he knocks at our open door," she thinks, and redoubles her pace.

That postman holds a letter in his hand at this moment, which announces Harold's proximate return.

Jackson, Mrs. Steele's confidential maid, is coming up from her supper when the postman knocks at the open door.

"Mercy upon us!" cries the abigail, with a start that almost upsets the tray she is carrying, the tray containing Miss Clare's supper.

Jackson had volunteered to take it upstairs herself to-night, not from any desire to oblige the housemaid, whose duty it is to wait upon

the governess, nor with a view to pleasing that young lady by the delicate attention; but only to try and glean some information at headquarters of the row-royal which had occurred this afternoon, and of which Jackson has as yet heard Miss Cecilia's version only.

"Rather dangerous leaving your door open on such a foggy night, miss," says the postman; "you'll find yourself carried off in the dark one of these times if you don't mind."

"Maybe I shouldn't if the right man came to fetch me," says Jackson promptly, and the busy man pursues his rat-tat rounds with a passing smile of appreciation. From the top of the kitchen-stairs Jackson argues the point of that open door with the servants below. Cook says she wonders if anything is took out of the umbrella-stand; and John the footman comes up, and is reassured by personal investigation.

Jackson and the supper arrive without further adventure on the third-floor landing. There is no response to the knock at the door of Miss Clare's room.

"Suppose she's in bed and asleep by this," the maid concludes, and feels very indignant at being balked of the gossip she had promised herself;

but is soon consoled by a reflection which savours of the sourness of the proverbial fox's grapes. "Not that I'd even try to talk to that girl," thinks Jackson; "for I never can get on with her, she's that stuck-up she makes one feel quite silent like. Just as though a nursery-governess was worth any more than a lady's-maid; certainly not to judge by her clothes. Bah!—that poor sort of pride is disgusting. I'm not going to stand knocking at your door all night, miss. I'll set your supper down, and if you don't choose to eat it you may starve, for all I care."

Jackson sets the tray down on the floor, and concludes that Miss Clare—miss, indeed!—has most likely cried herself to sleep, for she is no doubt utterly crushed by the wrath she has provoked to-day. "Now, if she were more friendly-like, and would talk to me about the missis and her doings sometimes, I should go straight into her room now, and tell her whose letter has just come; but as things are, she'll just have to do without knowing anything from me about her young man. Her young man, indeed! Why, I might as well be setting my cap at Mr. Maurice—and a deal better I look in my new cap with the blue ribbons than ever she could with her

hair all plain, and just put up in a lump at the back of her neck."

* * * * *

"Have you seen anything of Miss Clare this evening, Jackson?" asks Mrs. Steele, while her maid is undressing her.

Jackson remarks the absence of asperity in her mistress's tone as she asks the question, and sagely concludes that "a something" in Master Harold's letter has softened his mamma's feeling towards the governess at the moment.

"I took up her supper myself, ma'am," says the maid, making much of a condescension which, in Mrs. Steele's present mood, is likely to be appreciated; "and I asked cook for a little something extra, because Miss Clare didn't touch a morsel at tea-time; but I do believe she had gone to bed at nine o'clock, for she never answered when I knocked at her door; so I put the tray down without disturbing her."

"Just go up and see if she has taken it in now, Jackson. Though she has behaved very badly—most ungratefully—I do not wish her to starve."

The very excellent dinner of which Mrs. Steele had partaken this evening may have enlarged her

sympathies to some extent; and the long affectionate epistle from her darling sailor-boy, who held the first place in her heart, had decidedly softened her mood.

He was coming back—he would be at home in eight or ten weeks. Clare's abrupt dismissal must be condoned, a compromise should be effected. If Harold came home unexpectedly, and found the girl had been turned out, he might be led into some rash act which no subsequent regret could undo. This risk must be avoided at all hazards; and therefore Clare should be talked to, severely admonished, reminded of the insecurity of her position, and allowed to remain under certain restrictions, and with closer supervision.

As Mrs. Steele comes to this eminently satisfactory decision, Jackson returns with hasty steps and a frightened air.

"She is gone, ma'am!" she cries, breathless. "She has took her bonnet and cloak and her leather-bag; her books is gone, and the room's cleared out; and she's eat no supper, and she's gone!"

Mrs. Steele stares incredulously.

"Gone! Don't talk nonsense, Jackson. Where

should she go to? She has not a friend in the world."

But when Jackson tells the story of the open hall-door, Mrs. Steele becomes alarmed.

"The girl is a thief, no doubt," she says, rushing at the most detrimental inference; and mounts the steep stairs with amazing alacrity.

But the girl had taken nothing that was not her own; even the cast-off clothes which Cecilia had bestowed upon her from time to time were left in the drawers and on the pegs. She had worn the black gown and cloak bought out of her own salary, and had left no letter or trace of any kind to tell how she had gone, or where.

Mrs. Steele's impressions on that subject she very freely communicated to Maurice in their subsequent interview; but to Harold, when he came home, she did not dare to say one derogatory word. His grief and rage alarmed and silenced her, and a breach was created between mother and son which even time seemed unlikely to bridge over.

* * * * *

Clare, knowing little, and caring less, in what direction she turned her steps, so they but led her away from the park and the squares and the

terraces familiar to her, presently found herself in a large, crowded, and very noisy thoroughfare. She thought this must be the Edgware Road; but she had never seen it at night, and scarce recognised its altered aspect.

What a noise and roar and bustle! How rudely the people jostle and push as they tramp along over the muddy pavement.

It is Saturday night—the night of the people, *par excellence*; and the people themselves, happy in the fresh possession of the hardly-earned week's wage, rejoice in the fact as much as do the vendors of miscellaneous goods, who are lauding their wares and inviting purchasers in every variety of words, tones, and manner. The hoarse croak of the itinerant apothecary, who recommends lozenges warranted to cure the most obstinate form of cough, catarrh, or bronchitis, makes a bass second to the shrill piping of the lad who solicits the purchase of popular songs, comic and mee-lo-dra-matic, novel editions of which are temptingly displayed upon the board he carries before him like a tray.

“Two boxes of my famous lozenges for a penny, sir—only a penny, miss; now don't let your chance go by!” croaks the quack.

“‘Our fire is out, and we’ve got no more coal!’” sings the boy, quoting the first line of the ballad he holds in his hand. “Quite a new song—a new song and a fine song; provoking of laughter and ending in tears—and all for a penny, sir; who’ll buy, who’ll buy?”

Lozenges and songs are *articles de luxe*; but there are dozens of barrows, carts, and stalls, furnished with every variety of comestible, and generally useful, goods. Vegetables are arranged in artistic pyramids, and vociferously recommended as “All fresh—all fresh—gathered this morning, ma’am. A penny a lot; only one penny the lot!”

The nimble penny certainly plays an important part on the occasion of these Saturday markets, which may be termed the saturnalia of the costermonger, and which are held in six or seven of the chief thoroughfares of poor overcrowded London districts.

Some of the sellers coax, others seem to threaten. All are eager; most of them lie—like the lawyers—professionally of course.

Meat can be bought at these hebdomadal markets at about half the price asked either in shops or stores. The penny bloater is always in considerable request. Jugs, plates, cups, and

saucers may be had in oddly-assorted lots, at prices varying from threepence to one-and-nine-pence. For the latter sum you might store a china-closet.

Women's dresses and jackets, silk or other, are offered at half-a-crown a-piece—"As good as new, ma'am, quite as good as new." Boots, roughly repaired with blackened calico, can be purchased for one-and-nine a pair—"Only one-and-nine, ma'am, only one-and-nine, and quite as useful as new ones at seven-and-nine a pair. Only one-and-nine—only one-and-nine—buy!"

That one-and-nine is evidently considered a most imposing sum by dealer as well as purchaser.

Clare allows herself to be carried on and on by the rough pushing crowd. She can find no amusement in the bargaining and hurry-scurry of the market. The mob frightens her, and it all seems repulsive, terrible. She feels very weary, and longs for a little quiet, a little rest.

Her bag is very heavy; but she holds it securely, and is thankful to know it is hidden within the folds of her ample cloak. Her money is safe too. Sometimes she touches the purse

where it lies concealed in the bodice of her gown.

The shouts of the people, the sellers and the sold—those who drive bargains and those who are drunk—all this babble and discord bewilder and deafen her.

No food has passed her lips since midday; she begins to feel very faint.

Shall she never reach the end of this surging noisy crowd?

Ah, here at the cross-roads it seems to bear away to the right. Now she can escape from the hurrying throng. Straight ahead, in front of her, the street is comparatively quiet, and she can walk along this broad pavement untroubled and unchecked.

With a sigh of relief she quickens her pace, walking steadily on and on. The road widens and improves. To the right and the left are substantial houses of the size and pretension which justify the title of "mansion" in the advertisements. Most of them stand in square gardens, the wide gates of which abut on the pavement.

Clare wanders on and on. She hears a church-clock in the distance striking ten. Where shall she find a lodging for the night? Who will give

her shelter and a bed? She is a stranger in London—knows very few of the streets by name, and nothing of the life that is led in them.

She has come to the end of the broad prosperous-looking road now. The houses are less pretentious, and are built in rows or terraces. She sees a brilliantly-illuminated public-house on the opposite side of the street. She crosses over, intent on a closer inspection. It is evidently a rendezvous for omnibuses; several are drawn up in front, or along a street at the side. Some are turning their passengers out, others are preparing for a new journey townwards. Drivers, conductors, travellers—all are bustling, all are wanted somewhere, all have some task to perform. She alone is idle, helpless, forsaken; no one heeds, no one is waiting for, no one wants her.

She is standing at the edge of the curb now, reading the lettered advertisements on the bright windows of the public-house.

Hotel—Private entrance—Good beds—Fine Old Tom—Bass's ales—Scotch and Irish whiskies.

Shall she ask for a bed there? Why not? Hotels are intended for homeless travellers. She is certainly a traveller, and this purports to be an hotel. But even as she approaches a drunken

woman flounders out of the swinging door, and stumbles helplessly against Clare. Recovering her balance, the woman breaks into a shrill torrent of violent abuse, and threatens Clare with her savagely-clenched fists the while. Men and boys approach, eager to hear what the row is about, most of them anticipating and delighted at the prospect of a fight between two "gals."

Clare, trembling in every limb, terrified beyond measure, flies across the road again, and runs on and on as fast as her feet will carry her.

She has managed to evade the virago; no one is pursuing her. At last she pauses at the corner of a by-street, breathless.

There is a shop at this corner—a small shop—known to its frequenters as "Mrs. Dixon's all sorts." It merits the comprehensive title; for Mrs. Dixon does sell everything—mixed sweets, shag, lemonade, ginger-beer, bloaters, fresh eggs, and new milk. A ticket in the window arrests Clare's attention: "A Bedroom to Let."

She enters the shop.

"A glass of new milk, if you please."

"I suppose you can take it out of a mug?" says Mrs. Dixon, who has a sharp face, a sharper

voice, and wears a very black cap of the shape known as "widow's."

She is cross and tired just now; desirous of her supper, and vexed by the sight of detaining customers.

"Thank you," says Clare, and drinks the milk with evident relish. She was sinking for want of nourishment, and is most thankful for the restoring draught. "You have a room to let?" she asks timidly; and lifts her veil that the woman may see her face, for she has remarked the dubious glances with which that masklike veil has been regarded. "Could you take me in for the night? I am alone in London, and have nowhere to go."

Another woman enters the shop at this moment. She is stout, and looks good-tempered. She wears a bonnet with bright ribbons, and a handsome India shawl. She peers inquisitively out of her small black eyes, first at Clare and then at Mrs. Dixon. She has heard the girl's timid question, and is waiting for the shopkeeper's reply.

"Take you in? Lor', no; we only takes respectable lodgers—artisans and such-like; you're a deal too handsome to be about the streets alone

at night. Carrying a lady's travelling-bag, too! You're up to no good, I warrant. You'll get a bed to suit you at the coffee-house further up Kilburn way."

Clare pauses for a moment in miserable perplexity.

"I am so tired and so hungry," she says. "I will pay for my bed and my supper, of course. Oh, don't send me out into the streets again, please!" and she covers her face with her hands and bursts into tears.

The comely matron, who has by this time received the two bottles of lemonade she had asked for, looks compassionately at the sobbing girl.

"Don't fret, my dear," she says soothingly. "You come along o' me. I live just across the road in them villas, and I daresay I can put you up for the night. Have you got any money?"

"How much would you want?" asks Clare, brightening.

"Well, as it's late, and a unusual sort of thing, I couldn't take less than a half-crown, my dear."

Clare has taken the precaution to put some loose silver in her pocket, so she does not show

the purse which contains the bulk of her savings; but hands half-a-crown to the woman, who winks exultingly at Mrs. Dixon and leads the way across the road. Her house is the first of a row of two-storied dwellings known as Pomona Villas.

"My name is Mrs. Foley, my dear," says the owner of No. 1, opening the door with a latchkey.

Clare stands in the narrow hall waiting.

"Come in, come in, my dear," cries Mrs. Foley, who has gone into the parlour, and is lighting the gas, which flares up and shows every corner of the little room.

It is of the kind best described by the odious but expressive term "semi-genteel."

The furniture is covered with red rep. There is a sofa at one end, a chiffonier at the other. A small fire is feebly struggling in the narrow grate, and Mrs. Foley attacks it with a vigorous poker.

"We'll soon make the place look a bit more cheerful," she says. "Sit down, my dear, and make yourself at home."

Clare obediently sits down, but she cannot feel very much at home.

Mrs. Foley spreads a white cloth over the table, walks to and fro between it and the chiffo-

nier, and is evidently commencing preparations for supper.

"I'm not a regular lodging-house-keeper, you must know, my dear," she says, while she places knives, forks, glasses, and castors upon the table. "I purchases wardrobes. Ladies and gents waited upon at their own residences. No shop, you see—that keeps the business private; and the ladies prefer that, and so do the gents. Since I have took this little house, I find I can accommodate a few lodgers too. We all has our meals together, and that makes it cheerful like, you see. I am of what folks call a social turn. I always was fond of pleasant company, and gets on best with young people. The girls that live with me know me well, and trust me accordin'. We never have no secrets here; it's much easier to speak out. They tells me all their little affairs, business and private both. I hearkens to 'em, and then I give my advice. I know the world and the ways of it for better as for worse; and I warns 'em accordin' to my experience, which has been a pretty extensive one, I can assure you. Will you have a glass of sherry, my dear, or will you wait till supper-time?"

Clare preferred to wait. Mrs. Foley, declaring

herself "that faint," partook liberally of the sherry, and went on talking incessantly. She was becoming exceedingly anxious to hear some account of this remarkably handsome, timid, and silent young lady; but something in Clare's manner forbade impertinent inquiry.

"She's been frightened, and wants courage to speak out," concluded Mrs. Foley. "If I begin by telling her all about the other girls she'll come to talking about herself quite natural like. Strangers often want a little coaxing."

With this intention Mrs. Foley continued her prattle.

"It's Miss Purkiss has taught me to know the goodness there is in brown sherry," she says. "It does as much for me as brandy, and being only wine there's no harm in it. Miss Purkiss is one of the finest singers at the Cosmopolite Music Hall up our road. She's not home yet; but she won't be much after eleven. The moment she comes in, 'Lemon and sher, Foley,' she says. That's what I bought them bottles of lemonade for to-night. Singing does try the chest so, my dear; and Miss Purkiss says it always gives her a sort of sinking."

"It must be very trying," says Clare, feeling that she is expected to make some response.

"Ah, trying it may be," assents Mrs. Foley; "but there, it is only singing after all. Now the real hard work is in the ballet. There's Miss Flower—Mamsell Fleurette she's called in the bills—she had a hard time of it, if you like; and such corns, poor girl! The most of them is ready to scream with the agony of their corns."

"And is Miss Flower staying with you also?" asks Clare, anxious to pretend to some interest, though really far too tired to feel any at all.

"No; she's just left me and the Hall too; she has gone off with a gent as means to make her his lady-wife—so he's told her at least, and she believes him, no doubt. It's the way of young girls to believe the men; and it's the way of all men to tell lies when they're in love."

Clare makes a movement; it is scarcely perceptible; but those watchful eyes have observed it. Crossed in love, concludes Mrs. Foley. I thought as much. "The most important thing for Miss Flower, after all, is the present," she says, with emphasis. "What does by-and-by matter to her or any of us? Sir Danby Brough is the gentleman's name; he's a tip-top swell, and he's pro-

viding very handsome for her at present, so her room's vacant, and you can have that for to-night, and to-morrow we'll see how we get on. I suppose you're in the theatre too; but you don't dance or sing—you're too quiet for that. Is the drama your line? You look like Maud Fanshawe, who takes the walking-lady at Clark's, you know. Have you gone off in a huff with your manager, or what has happened, to send you out in the streets like this? You're a very handsome girl, you know—Mrs. Dixon spoke the truth there—and it's pecooliar to see such a pretty creature as you with no home to go to."

"I wish I was not pretty," says Clare, indignant tears filling her eyes again. "If it hadn't been for what people call my beauty, I might have been allowed to stay at home in peace and comfort, and lived on as quietly and contentedly as other poor girls do, instead of——"

"Oh, was they jealous of you, my dear? It's always the way at theatres as well as at halls; but you shouldn't have minded that. You should just have give them as good as they gave you, and then have run off with the richest man you could find—not all by yourself like, as if no one cared to trouble about you."

Clare looks at Mrs. Foley in dismay. What sort of house is this she has come to? Perhaps the woman's ignorance leads her to say things she cannot mean in the sense in which Clare understands them.

"I have never been on the stage," she says, after a few minutes' uncomfortable pause, "nor do I know anything at all about theatres or actresses, or dancers or singers. All I can do is needlework. To-morrow I will show you some specimens, and perhaps you can manage to dispose of some of my best pieces. I was nursery-governess in a family, and I found I had to leave my home quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly. Indeed, I only came away to-night" ("Can it really have been to-night?" thinks Clare; it seems a week ago since she stole down the stairs in Hyde Park Place), "and now I must earn my bread as best I can." She is not demonstrative by nature, and is herself surprised at the tears which again fill her eyes and choke her utterance. "Will you allow me to go to bed now?" she entreats, in a broken voice. "I am so tired and so unhappy. I will try to give you a more satisfactory account of myself in the morning; but I would so much rather not meet any more strangers to-night."

"Just as you please, my dear; just as you please," says Mrs. Foley. "This is Liberty Hall, you know. You've paid for your bed, and you have the right to go to it as soon as you please. But you'll have a bit of supper first, won't you now? 'Ere, take a crust and a bit of cheese with you."

Clare accepts the plate which is offered her, and follows Mrs. Foley, who leads the way up the steep narrow stairs to the room at the back of the second floor. The room is small, the furniture of the simplest, not to say roughest, description, but the bed looks inviting. The sheets are coarse, but they are certainly clean. The near prospect of getting into that bed fills Clare with thankfulness.

"I am sure I shall be very comfortable, and I am very much obliged to you," she says, in grateful response to Mrs. Foley's "Good-night."

To be alone, peaceful, and at rest for this night at least, is at this moment the *summum bonum* for the weary, broken-spirited, heart-sick girl. Her hostess retires vexed and grumbling; she is annoyed and disappointed to find that her new lodger is bent on seeking solitude so early this evening. She had desired to trot out her

handsome prize for the benefit of Miss Purkiss and her "young man," who mostly drops in to share his lady-love's supper when she returns from her labours at the "Cosmopolite Hall."

Fortunately for Clare, she knows nothing of Mrs. Foley's discontent, nor of the protracted supper, the steaming punch, and the impromptu rehearsal of a new scena on the part of the singer; nor is she disturbed by the knowledge of the startling romances invented on her behalf by her loquacious and imaginative hostess. She has securely locked and bolted the door of her little chamber, poor child, and, too utterly exhausted to think, or weep, or pray, soon sinks into a profound and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUIT.

Love like a shadow flies, when substance love pursues:
Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.

THE deep heavy sleep which is the natural consequence of complete mental and physical prostration is not refreshing.

Clare awakes with a start next morning; but she still feels drowsy and stupid, and gazes about the strange room in which she finds herself in a bewildered unrecognising way. But after a while she remembers all that happened to her on that most miserable and eventful yesterday.

All?

Yes; her struggle with that horrid Lord Verstrume, the scene with Mrs. Steele, the rude noisy crowd in the Edgware Road, the virago outside the public-house, Mrs. Dixon's sharp features and sharper words—all the trials which came upon her, as unexpectedly as a thunder-clap, recur to her now with most depressing realism.

She hears no one stirring in the house where she had found shelter when her despair had

reached a climax; but the church-bells outside are ringing a cheerful invitation.

It must be very late. She rises hastily, afraid Mrs. Foley will be annoyed by her apparent laziness. As Clare remembers her hostess's round red face, her coarse speech and coarser laughter, as she recalls the frequently-replenished wine-glass, and subsequent alteration of voice and manner, she shudders at the prospect of meeting that landlady again.

But Mrs. Foley supping, exhilarated, and communicative on Saturday night, is a very different person from Mrs. Foley drowsy, depressed, and "altogether out of sorts," as she declares herself to be, this Sunday morning.

Miss Purkiss does not appear at breakfast, which consists of strong tea and very salt bloaters. Mrs. Foley partakes liberally of both. She always feels "a sort of sinking" in the morning, she explains to Clare, who with unmistakable amazement is watching her pour brandy into her second cup of tea. "And that sort of faint sensation is only got over by a taste of old brandy, which gives a fillip to one's nervous system." This she adds in a tone of apology. Clare watches and listens in silence; the matutinal aspect of her hostess is by

no means reassuring, nor does the first view of Mrs. Foley's maid (of all work) give the stranger any satisfaction. The poor slavey (how well the term applies to dirty Liz!) looks as though her life was spent in a coal-cellar or a dust-hole. Clare thinks of prim neat Jackson and of pretty pert Betty the housemaid at Hyde Park Place, and remembers their specially dapper appearance on Sunday mornings, when the work of the house was always performed with extra alacrity, to enable the maids to get away in good time for church.

Clare would like to go to church this morning; but is restrained from suggesting such a proceeding by fear. The possibility of meeting Lord Verstrume in the streets haunts and terrifies her. He drives about all over London, and at all hours, as she knows well by her late painful experience; for he has been in the habit of way-laying and following her to church for some months past. She has occasionally gone to Westminster Abbey, to attend afternoon service, and no sooner had she glided into one of the hospitably open seats there than she discovered his lordship in her immediate vicinity. He haunted her as cruel Mephisto tormented Gretchen, and

rejoiced in her evident discomfort with truly satanical delight.

Clare has very vague ideas as to the relative position of Pomona Villas, the Marble Arch, and Hyde Park Place; but she is quite aware that she must avoid the latter points of the metropolitan compass. Before she ventures forth, therefore, it will be prudent to satisfy herself as to her present whereabouts.

"Miss Purkiss says she'll have her breakfast took upstairs this morning; she don't feel well enough to come down." Dirty Liz vouchsafes this information, looking in undisguised amazement at the new lodger the while; and when she arrives upstairs with Miss Purkiss's tea, she informs that young lady that missis's new girl is a rare one. "She don't speak," says Liz, "but she just sits and looks straight afore her with the biggest and sorrowfullest eyes, like Dr. Clarkson's big brown dog did the day before he was run over. Do you remember, Miss Purkiss?"

"You're a fool, Liz," says Miss Purkiss. "Don't bother me; I want another hour's sleep, for I've company coming to-night."

"Well, you haven't much to say for yourself this morning. Are you always so dull, or haven't

you got out of last night's sulks yet? Why don't you talk a-bit?"

It is thus Mrs. Foley addresses her silent lodger, as she herself rises from the breakfast-table and pushes her chair away with a jerk. She looks indignant, and she speaks crossly.

Clare, who has been completely absorbed by her thoughts, is vexed with herself for the inattention which has brought about such an unexpected rebuke.

"I am sorry if I appeared rude, Mrs. Foley," she says humbly. "I am really in great trouble about my immediate future. Will it be possible for me to remain here a few days longer? By the end of the week I shall hope to get some orders for work, and then I could look out for a situation or a permanent home of some kind. Meanwhile I hope I may stay with you."

"If you stay you'll have to pay. I suppose you are aware of that fact," says Mrs. Foley. "I have to earn my living, and I'm not exactly disposed to keep anyone out of charity. If you like to pay me two guineas down, you can have bed and board here until Monday week. That's the most reasonable I can do for you."

Mrs. Foley has taken the measure of Clare's

worldly inexperience pretty accurately, and is determined to make the girl pay dearly for any practical lesson she chooses to teach her.

"Do you think you can get me some orders for work, or will you dispose of things as I make them?" asks Clare timidly. "I can pay you the two guineas you require now; but I must earn some money before I incur any fresh debts." She takes her purse from its hiding-place and hands Mrs. Foley the two guineas without any further remark. Her calm dignity, her gentle acquiescence, perplex and irritate the shrewish landlady. She is accustomed to deal with vicious precocity; effrontery amuses her; copious libations and coarse jokes are the pleasure of her life; but Clare's subdued speech, her quiet movements, and serious questioning eyes discomfit and make her so restless that she presently goes to the door of the parlour and summons Miss Purkiss in a peremptory manner. It will be quite a relief to hear Miss Purkiss's strident laugh, and watch her rough movements.

Presently the first singer of the Cosmopolite makes her appearance. She is a stout red-haired woman; and although it is now one o'clock, she has apparently not had time to complete her toilet.

Her tangled locks are loosely coiled around a high comb; a flannel *peignoir* which may have been *couleur de rose* once, but is only coloured by age and grease now, clings in unbecoming folds to her portly figure. Clare glances at this yawning, lazily-stretching person with an astonishment nearly allied to disgust. Clare has the instincts of a gentlewoman; and the severe moral discipline, added to the excellent education inculcated by the eccentric but most devoted old tutor at Torchester, have tended to enlarge her views, but in nowise detracted from her natural womanly refinement. She has of late experienced trouble and disappointment, poor girl; but until now she has never been brought into immediate contact with absolute vulgarity, with low unkempt womanhood, and she recoils instinctively. Mrs. Steele, with all her aspirations to appear as a fine lady, never soared above the level of what she herself would have described as "most genteel," nor did she descend to vulgarity. Her dress, though wanting in taste, was always good in quality and material, and all her surroundings, though not artistic, were as good as money could buy. Amidst this luxury Clare had grown up, and felt herself, thanks to the devotion of her betrothed, one of the family.

With his sudden departure all had been miserably changed, of course; but though she had then commenced a life of comparative seclusion, she continued to breathe an atmosphere of refinement which seemed natural to her.

And now she suddenly finds herself in the company of a dealer in secondhand wardrobes, and of an unwashed, unkempt, loudly-bragging music-hall singer. How long can she endure this existence?

Anxious thoughts about the diminished store in that poor little purse of hers are beginning to torment her, the two guineas she has just paid have left her so very little to go on with.

On the Monday morning she shows Mrs. Foley some exquisite specimens of that artistic needlework in which she has long excelled. "Will you try to sell these pattern-strips for me, or get me some orders for similar work?" she asks.

Mrs. Foley is fairly taken aback at the beauty of colour and design in the specimens submitted to her. "I can make money out of this fine lady," she thinks; "and she's certainly far less trouble than Purkiss, though never likely to be such good company. And I do like a girl I can talk to and laugh with. What shall I do about this business?"

Mrs. Foley is in a dilemma, for Miss Purkiss, in a violent fit of passion, has just declared to her landlady that either that stuck-up broomstick (Clare), with her mighty fine airs and graces, shall go out of the house, or she (Miss Purkiss) will leave, and at once.

The origin of Miss Purkiss's violent displeasure was jealousy, pure and simple. On the previous evening two "gentlemen" had appeared at Pomona Villas, and both had overtly bestowed far more attention on reticent unresponsive Clare than Miss Purkiss had been able to obtain for herself, in spite of her very evident efforts to please. It was a hard case for Miss Purkiss, since one of them was her own young man, the future husband of "the most successful lady vocalist of the day." And he had slighted his bride-elect for the sake of that stuck-up wax doll, who hadn't a word to say for herself, and could only sit and stare out of those big brown eyes that looked like a hungry dog's. Barring the pathos, Liz's comments were just. The second visitor on that Sunday evening was one Mr. Joseph Samuels, who came on a matter of secondhand wardrobes, and intended to do business with Mrs. Foley; but who, seeing Clare in the parlour, remained for pleasure—the

pleasure of staring the handsomest girl it had ever been his good luck to see out of countenance.

Next morning Miss Purkiss said to her landlady: "Either that girl or I must leave this house."

"She's paid more than double what you do, my dear," answered Mrs. Foley. "I've promised to keep her for another week; but, rather than you should be annoyed, I'll give her orders to keep upstairs in her own room while she is here. Then you and your friends sha'n't ever be troubled with her interference no more. That I will promise you; so let matters be settled between us as comfortable as they was afore, won't you, my dear?"

From this time Mrs. Foley improvised a part for herself on the well-known lines of Mrs. Bouncer, in "Box and Cox." She naturally consulted her own interests in the first place. Then she turned her attention to reconciling the conflicting requirements of her antagonistic boarders.

Having temporarily pacified Miss Purkiss, whose pursuits and profession took her away from home during the greater part of the day and evening, Mrs. Foley turned her personal attention to the profitable disposal of Clare's silk broideries and elaborate crewel-work, specimens of which she

took with her when she went off on her rounds. She sold two pieces for thirty shillings on the first day, and obtained high praises and a fresh order. She paid the delighted worker ten shillings, keeping twenty shillings as her commission; and, finding this manner of doing business profitable, determined to make her industrious lodger as comfortable as circumstances would allow.

"In future it will be better and more convenient for you to work in your own room, my dear," Mrs. Foley suggested. "Liz shall make a fire up there, and bring your meals to you. That way you won't be worried or disturbed, and you and Miss Purkiss won't ever meet, which is as well; singing does wear her so, you see, and it tries her temper a good bit too."

Clare accepted the revised conditions of her prolonged stay at Pomona Villas gratefully. Sufficient work to enable her to pay Mrs. Foley, and immunity from further personal encounter with that terrible Miss Purkiss, were all she desired. For the jealous wrath of that lady, and the epithets she hurled at her unconscious and most innocent rival, had frightened Clare as much as the torrent of abuse bestowed upon her by that angry drunken woman in the street.

So Clare, having adopted the inoffensive title of "Miss Smith," stayed quietly on at Pomona Villas, spending the short days and the long evenings at work in her own room, dirty Liz (who was far nicer than she looked), waiting upon her with evident pleasure, and, in the course of a few weeks, yielding so far to Clare's good influence as to appear with clean hands and face, and looking quite neat in a plain linsey gown Clare's skilful fingers had fashioned for her out of a cast-off garment of Mrs. Foley. The faster Clare worked, the more exacting her task-mistress became. That did not trouble the girl; but what she bitterly resented was the fact of the landlady's connivance at the open admiration bestowed upon her by that odious old Jew, Mr. Joseph Samuels, who, on two occasions, had the audacity to accompany Liz upstairs when she brought Miss Smith's supper-tray. He first offered Clare a remunerative position as his housekeeper, suggesting that she would keep an eye on the shop, and gloating over the prospect of all the good customers her handsome face and fine figure would attract.

"If you'd put on a second-hand gown, you'd show it off to that advantage," he said, "that the girls would think it was new."

On the second occasion Mr. Samuels persuaded Mrs. Foley to accompany him, and then he very seriously asked Clare to be his wife.

Acting on Liz's shrewd advice, Clare determined to put an end to this kind of persecution by refusing to begin a fresh order for work, until Mrs. Foley pledged herself as responsible for Mr. Samuels's future good conduct.

"Not but what you are very foolish, my dear," she assured Clare emphatically; "for the man is rich; he's doing a thriving business; he's admired you from the first; and he is ready and willing to make you a very good husband. His age makes it all the better for you, you see; old men are more easy to lead when once they are in love with a pretty girl, and that Joe Samuels certainly is with you."

This *page d'amour*, so unexpectedly opened before Clare's astonished eyes, startled and made her anxious again.

But Mrs. Foley, as soon as she saw that it would be detrimental to Clare's work to allow her to be interrupted, took means to prevent any further intrusions; and so the girl stayed on and on, her work paying for her board and lodging, how liberally she little knew; though Liz, who

heard a good deal of what went on in the parlour, gave her some startling hints on the subject. But she endured patiently, living in the hope of some day changing and bettering her position. With that object in view she ventured out at times, entered various shops, and solicited employment—a situation, or work of any kind. She would be delighted to make herself “generally useful,” she said earnestly.

But there were seemingly insuperable objections which precluded such engagements. She was too young, she was too showy; quiet-looking girls were always preferred in respectable shops. She had better try for a barmaid’s place, that sort of trade would suit her style; but she would want some new clothes before even a publican would take her in. That old merino gown of hers was terribly worn and patched and darned certainly.

Other shopkeepers curtly informed her that as she had no experience of any kind of business it was not likely they would undertake the teaching of a stranger, who brought neither character nor recommendation. The girl felt they were right, and wandered away again, sorrow, not anger, in her heart.

There came a time, after some six weeks of

this dreary existence, when poor Clare felt so crushed and troubled by the trials and disappointments which met her on every side, that the possibility of going to Mrs. Steele to ask for pardon and assistance occurred to her; but on the heels of such possibility came the awful remembrance of Lord Verstrume and of the threatened penitentiary. Then the poor girl impulsively concluded that it was better and safer for her to make the best of present hard circumstances—to do as much work for Mrs. Foley as she could manage, and to look forward to better times, which the future must surely bring her.

But her good intentions, her courage, and her hopes were doomed to sudden and fatal collapse.

She had devoted three entire weeks to the completion of a masterpiece in crewel-work. It was a bronze-cloth table-cover, exquisitely embroidered with sunflowers in varying shades of amber, orange, and brown. Mrs. Foley had provided the materials according to a special order given her by one of her wealthiest patronesses, an actress, possessing a bijou residence in St. John's Wood, who had already paid the wardrobe-seller considerable sums for her *protégée's* "beautiful work."

"I shall certainly give you a sovereign for this, my dear, whatever Madame Rosie pays me. Though she's the richest of all my customers, she's very keen at driving a bargain, I can tell you."

Clare accepted the sovereign with thanks. That Mrs. Foley received five guineas for the table-cover mattered nothing to her. She could at least purchase some useful material for herself now, and make a new dress-jacket and hat out of it. She was ashamed to cross the street, so shabby were her clothes.

"I shall set out at once to get myself a new gown," she informed Mrs. Foley, who was at that moment departing with the beautiful table-cover in her arms, and was therefore in very good humour.

Clare also sallied forth with unusual animation in her face and movements; the prospect of shopping, and obtaining a new dress for herself, pleasing her quite as much as it would any other woman.

Never since she had fled from Harold's home had she felt in such good spirits as she did on this deliciously bright clear November morning. Dark and dull days had been plentiful

of late, therefore this unwonted brightness within and without was the more thoroughly appreciated.

In one of the largest shops in Edgware Road, Clare saw a complete costume of dark serge, which suited her taste and her means. She had still two pounds left out of the fund she originally started with.

She tried on the serge garments, and found that they would require but little alteration, dress and *paletôt* fitted passably.

"If you can wait half an hour, miss," suggested the saleswoman, with a deprecating glance at the customer's shabby clothing, "you can put the new costume on here, and let us send your other dress (?) home." She was too well bred to use the words "old clothes;" but her tone conveyed her meaning. "You intend to pay cash, I suppose?"

Yes; Clare intended to pay cash—to part with the last sovereign, almost with the last shilling, that poor little purse of hers contained; but she did not mention this distressing fact. Mrs. Foley would be sure to bring home a fresh order and new materials from Madame Rosie's to-day, and a fortnight's work would replenish the reduced exchequer.

At the end of a long half-hour she walked out of the draper's shop completely rehabilitated, and not in the least resenting the saleswoman's pithy comment: "Well, now you do look a perfect lady, miss."

"Fine feathers," thought Clare smiling, and wondered what Mrs. Foley would say. Should she be scolded for her prolonged absence during the precious daylight hours, which were the best for her fine work? If Madame Rosie had paid a good price for the table-cover Mrs. Foley would be in the best of tempers; if not——

But what makes the girl's eyes dilate and her face blanch as she is about to turn from the main road into Pomona Villas?

She pauses with a start, for she sees a brougham standing at Mrs. Foley's gate; and she knows that conspicuous carriage and its owner only too well. The truth flashes across her in a moment. On several occasions Mrs. Foley has alluded to a certain rich Lord Feston, whom she always spoke of as a great friend of Madame Rosie's. She must have misunderstood the name—it was Verstrume, of course. And he has just seen that new table-cover, which is similar in design to one lately made for Mrs. Steele; and he

has made inquiries, and now—he has discovered her hiding-place.

Alas, what shall she do?

She stands in hopeless perplexity, when Liz touches her sleeve. The poor little maid has also just turned the corner, and is carrying a bottle of champagne in her arms.

“It’s for an old gent,” she exclaims breathlessly. “He told me to bring the very best, and he giv’ me ten shillings. He must be rich—Oh my! And he has come after you, miss, and he and the missis is both in a rage because you was out so long. Wherever did you get all them brand-new clothes from?”

“Good-bye, dear good Liz! God will bless you for your kindness to me. I have only a shilling to give you; but take my other clothes when they are sent home. Don’t, don’t try to stop me—good-bye!” Clare almost gasps in her breathless fear and anxiety.

And, before Liz fully understands her meaning, Clare is already hurrying away, back into the main road—on and on—anxious only to put as much ground as possible between herself and her dreaded, detested pursuer.

CHAPTER XV.

WEARY.

The hands that reach through darkness, guiding men.

AFTER a time Clare moderates her pace, but continues to walk steadily on and on. Her first endeavour is to get clear of that main road, which seems most fraught with danger, since Lord Verstrume would naturally drive that way when he leaves Pomona Villas. Therefore Clare determines to continue her wanderings westward.

That is a different direction from any she has taken before. The neighbourhood is new and quiet. There are very few people in these scarce-finished streets; the rows and rows of houses, villas, terraces, and so-called "gardens" succeed one another in startling numbers, but with most wearisome monotony.

Clare begins to feel very tired and very hungry. She ate but little breakfast, and hours have passed since she set out upon her peregrination in such buoyant spirits this morning. She has walked past miles and miles of stuccoed

erections now—a journey that must seem flat, stale, and unprofitable at all times. In her present state of miserable perplexity it seems as interminable as it is depressing.

Where can it lead her? What will be the end of all this purposeless wandering?

It is past three o'clock. The glory of the short November day is over. What will become of her when night comes? She has no money, no watch, no jewellery. There is nothing she can dispose of, except—— But no; it would be better to starve outright than to sell Harold's gift, the ring that says, "*For ever!*"

She peeps into her little purse. There is no coin of any kind left in it. That shilling which she pressed into poor Liz's unwilling hand was indeed her last. A penny would have bought her a glass of milk. Never before had she realised the immense value of one single penny. She feels so hungry. Shall she go into a baker's shop and beg for a piece of bread? She begins to wish she had her old clothes on again. A petition for alms would not have seemed incompatible with her late poverty-stricken appearance, but asking for charity in a new "travelling costume" would be preposterous. People would either laugh at or

scorn her. Oh, if she could have rescued her bag, her books, her specimens of work! But Fate had indeed been hard this time; for, in her desperate fear of that designing monster Lord Verstrume, she had been compelled to abandon all her small possessions, and with them her further chances of earning bread. Of what use is her ability to work, when she has neither materials nor designs to practise with?

She has paused at the corner of a street, and in her utter weariness is leaning against a blank wall. There is some relief in this position, and she so longs for rest. Her head aches with a throbbing, numbing pain; all her energy is spent; she fears her feet will carry her no farther—in any case where can she go?

Reader, has it ever occurred to you how absolutely alone a gentlewoman may be in the crowded streets of busy preoccupied London?

Clare wonders if she can summon sufficient strength and resolution to drag herself a few miles farther, and get out into the country to-night.

In her wanderings she has crossed the Harrow Road. Harrow is a country place; she has heard Harold speak of the great boys' school

there. Can she possibly reach Harrow to-night? She could ask for shelter, or at least for bread, at a modest cottage-door; but her heart quails before the thought of knocking at a conventional villa.

As she stands pondering thus, she hears the tinkling of a bell. The sound of bells always attracts her attention, for it carries her thoughts back to Torchester. The bell of the college-chapel at Torchester had just such a sound, and it always rang at the sunset-hour on the early-darkening winter days. The sounds she hears now seem to invite her. If she should find a church-door open, she may creep in and—rest.

She ascertains the direction whence the sound proceeds, and follows it.

Presently she finds herself in a narrow back-street, at the end of which is a red-brick building surmounted by a cross. She sees a few people straggling in. Suddenly the bell stops. Impelled by an impulse too comforting to need resistance, she also enters the building. They can but turn her out again. What will that matter? What can anything matter now? Her strength has forsaken her. She feels crushed and hopeless.

A young man, with a pale sad face, is read-

ing prayers, or rather praying, for he needs no book. He knows that sorrowful confession of sin and weakness by heart.

Clare kneels down and prays also; for the moment her burden seems lightened. The common confession of helplessness—the thought that each one there present carries his or her own burden, and that one and all are praying to the same beneficent Father for help, strength, and consolation—comforts her exceedingly, and makes her feel less desolate in her trouble.

The congregation is chiefly composed of women, and most of them sorrowful-looking women.

Clare shivers. The chill damp of the winter twilight seems to have penetrated her bones. It is only now, since she has entered the warm soothing atmosphere of the church, that she realises how bitterly cold she had felt without.

Beauty is not only a joy, but a consolation.

Unconsciously Clare is influenced by the delicate beauty of her present surroundings. The stone fretwork in the chancel, the carved-oak pulpit, the flowers on the altar, the evergreens about the font, appeal to her artistic eye and sense, and also to something far deeper; for beneath this

outward appearance Clare reads its spiritual meaning. She understands the moral loveliness of which this is but the outward symbol.

The prayers are over, the anthem is sung, the young man gives a very short sermon, and the service is at an end.

Clare watches a procession of men and boys filing from the altar and up the aisle.

How vividly it all recalls Torchester!

One of the boys has a round merry face, and crisp golden curls lie on his forehead and temples. Clare remembers another face that used to look smiling and bright like that. She falls upon her knees again; she hides her aching head in her hands, and stifles the sobs which are choking her.

That church is never closed. It is dedicated to St. Barnabas, "the son of consolation."

And is there any hour of the twenty-four in which an aching heart may not require and long for peace and consolation?

So Clare kneels undisturbed, weeping and praying, ineffably sad, and yet much comforted.

If she could get speech with that sad-faced curate, she thinks she could summon up courage to tell him all her griefs, to ask him for advice

and help. His face betrays suffering and sorrow; but it is neither cold nor unsympathetic as a sad young face too often is.

But when she rises from her knees she is alone. The congregation has dispersed, the curate has gone.

Only one old woman is left, who is feebly tottering towards the door at this moment. In the dim light she stumbles over a hassock.

In an instant Clare is beside her, supporting and leading her until she has crossed the threshold.

Oh, how chill is the air of the winter evening. Clare shivers as she meets it.

"You are cold, deary," says the old woman. "It is a bitter night; won't you come in and have a cup of tea with me? I live close by, in one of those little houses up the next turning."

Never did Clare taste such nectar as the cup of tea brewed by the poor old woman, who lives in one of the neat little almshouses in the adjoining street. She thanks the hospitable crone in words. She thanks God in her heart. And then she sets out again, prepared, she thinks, to face the cruel wintry blast, and whatever further trouble the night may have in store for her.

If things come to the very worst, she can come back in an hour or two, and beg the old woman for leave to sleep in a chair in her room. At present pride seals her lips. She dares not ask for shelter where the comfort of food has been offered, and that warm cup of tea been so generously given.

"I have lost my way, and I have no money to give you; please tell me the name of this street," she says, as she takes her leave.

And she finds she has wandered to Chelsea, all *terra incognita* to her.

A bitter wind is blowing; cold wet sleet is driving into her face as she walks forth once more.

Where can she go now? What shall she do?

She will try to walk a little farther to get some life into her chilled limbs.

She refused bread when the old woman offered it to her. Now the gnawing pains of hunger torment her. Shall she return and beg for what she has just refused, or shall she creep back into the church again, and hide herself there until morning?

How bitterly, awfully cold is the night!

She walks faster and faster to rouse the circulation in her frozen feet.

Here is a long low building lying back from the road, and there is a narrow passage at the side of it. Shall she creep up that way? It may lead to some cottages—to some place where they will believe her honest, and will help her.

She can but return to the almshouses and her charitable old friend if no other shelter should be forthcoming.

She glides along the narrow passage, holding by the wall. She is trembling; she feels very weak and faint.

Yes; there are buildings at the back; they are not cottages. But there are no lamps, all looks dark and poor. Shall she find a door and knock?

As she approaches what seems like a door, she stumbles against a step; and in trying to recover her balance, she sinks down upon the cold stone. The door is at her back now and supports her. She will sit here for a while and rest. She is sheltered from the bitter wind—that is well. She had no strength left to battle against it any further.

She feels very weary, very cold, very quiet. Is she going to die?

The sleet has turned to snow. She watches the flakes coming down. She looks at the flakes on the ground.

A mist is before her eyes; the flakes on the ground seem to move upward now. She lifts her head wondering, and it falls forward with a jerk. She knows no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

PERCY.

Art gives life its best reprieves.

VERY different is the real artist, Percy Hetheringham, from the "cad" and "adventurer" poor Harold in his unreasoning despair imagined him.

Percy has excellent prospects—a fact which in itself lifts a man's head and puts a smile upon his face. He is the heir-elect of a wealthy bachelor uncle—young, handsome, talented, very generous, but also very extravagant. The soul of honour, as men of the world count honour; given to flirting, and always ready to meet a coquette half-way. He offers his heart, and bestows

flowers, compliments, and attentions with unsparing liberality wherever he finds such gifts are appreciated; but he is far too much in love with himself and his liberty to dream of curtailing it by wearing fetters matrimonial.

In spite of these frivolous attributes, he is a good and devoted son to his widowed mother. And she, dear lady, regards Percy as the light of her eyes, and the incarnation of manly beauty and virtue. In this conviction her brother, the wealthy colonial merchant, Monsieur Bacchelier, fully concurs; and these two old people, who have reached the winter of human life, still find some of "spring's delights" in watching the bright youth of the son and nephew both love and admire so heartily. Though not the Adonis his fond mother considers him, Percy is really a very good-looking young man. He is not tall; but his figure is powerful and well proportioned. His gray eyes, like the eyes of most artists, are observant and keen. They have a trick of concentration, which really is the endeavour to focus any object under notice, with a latent view to reproduction. This habit lends Percy an earnest and intent expression, which is only changed when he laughs; then he looks boyish and merry as his white teeth

show under the slight *retroussé* moustache. The French blood that courses in his mother's veins runs gaily in his also, and inspires a certain debonair manner, which is considered fascinating, and proves irresistible to most women.

Percy has already made his mark as an artist; he loves his profession and the social triumphs it secures him. His temperament is genial, and it is pleasant to find a cordial welcome wherever he goes. He is a general favourite in that exclusive coterie known as the Academy Club, whose members are professionally engaged in the pursuit of the Fine Arts. Most of them have already won laurels in their respective callings. To be popular among men like these gives Percy a certain distinction, which he thoroughly appreciates. He likes to stand well with his fellows, and to know that there is scarce a member of that club who would refuse to do him a service, or have other than good words to say of him.

But not only among his fellow-men is Percy a favourite. Ladies of the *beau monde*, artists' wives and sisters, as well as many others, old and young, are prodigal of invitations and favours for the captivating young painter. His studio bears witness to the generosity of his patronesses, who

have bestowed all manner of gifts upon him, from unique specimens of ancient china to elaborately-embroidered modern slippers, cigar-cases, and smoking-caps. The velvet painting-coat he wears while he is at his work has been carefully lined and quilted by the fair hands of a certain Lady Annette, who considers the patronage of rising genius her vocation in life.

The chairs and the sofa in his studio and "antechamber" are covered with his fond mother's needlework, and sorely has the good lady tried her failing sight to make her dear boy's home pretty with the delicate labour of her industrious fingers. So Percy may justly be described as one of Fortune's favourites. The Venetian mirror in his anteroom is ornamented (?) with notes and cards of invitation, in many colours, sizes, and shapes. The orthodox square paste-board is there, which officially "*Requests the honour;*" and the dainty crumpled rose-leaf note, which begs "My dear Mr. Hetheringham, for the pleasure," etc., "*early, and sans cérémonie;*" or to supper after the theatre, or to a smoking concert, or an impromptu dance in "our studio."

Percy devotes his mornings to his models and his work with creditable persistency; but with the

waning light of the precious day he sets forth on pleasure and recreation bent.

A fashionable "At Home," with its concomitant tea, muffins, chat, and music, is hardly suggestive of keen enjoyment to a light-hearted young artist; and as a rule Percy avoids these drearily dull ceremonials. But Lady Annette St. Clair, who justly prides herself on receiving the *élite* of the artistic world in her *salon*, has made a point of Mr. Hetheringham's presence on this particular November afternoon. Lady Annette is a charming woman, and she has a very decided will of her own, to which Percy, after a feeble resistance, is bound to yield as other men do. So he sets forth, obedient, though reluctant, and yawning at the anticipation of the boredom which awaits him.

But once in the presence of the gentle ladies, who greet him with pleasant smiles and words of welcome, he soon forgets his former misgivings, and responds to the attentions lavished upon him with that un-English vivacity for which he is so much admired. His attempts at conversation are suddenly checked, however, by an announcement which fills most of the men who hear it with dismay.

"I must request silence for my friend Miss Olympia Lee, who has kindly consented to recite 'Maud Muller' for us," says Lady Annette, in that clear staccato tone of hers, which penetrates the thickest buzz of general conversation, as it does the tender murmur of whispered confidences.

"If she herself would recite, we should all be delighted to listen," says Percy *sotto voce*, to a man standing by his side, "but it is the greatest mistake to inflict promiscuous spouting upon thinking men."

"Yes, indeed," assents the other, who is an author with a preference for the reading of his own works. "Only last night I endured tortures at an evening party, where a Transatlantic female held forth in blank verse for three-quarters of an hour. If this is the same woman, I shall bolt."

"What was she like?" asks Percy, smiling.

"She was tall and stout," says Mr. Author; "she wore short locks, a man's coat, a *pince-nez*, and a moustache."

"Be comforted, my dear fellow; this is certainly not one of the strong-minded crew," says Percy, as his eyes light on the lady their hostess is leading into the centre of the now silent circle of guests.

Olympia Lee is small, dark, delicate. She wears a close-fitting velvet gown, lace ruffles around her slender throat and wrists, lace lappets on her smooth black hair. Her demeanour is dignified, her delivery polished, and, as the audience notes with satisfaction, there is a blessed absence of twang in her speech.

Percy, who likes to be comfortable, leans leisurely back in a low armchair, watches the lady attentively, and listens with interest. The poem is new to him, and he finds it full of suggestion. He is just now much troubled for lack of suitable paintable subjects; he has been in anxious consultation with experienced friends, and he has been "reading up," with a view to deciding on his principal picture for next year's Academy. Hitherto this promiscuous research has had no satisfactory result; but as Miss Lee presents the picture of "Maud Muller" to his mental vision, it takes a decided, a feasible shape. He repeats fragments of the lines to himself as they fall from the reader's lips in musical rhythm. "*Beneath the torn hat glowed the wealth of simple beauty and rustic health . . . A vague unrest . . . a nameless longing filled her breast . . . the meadow sweet with hay . . .*"

"She would have rippling golden hair," thinks Percy; "the rake in her hand, and wonderful eyes—eyes that tell of that nameless longing *yes!*" He decides as he springs to his feet, "I have found my subject."

"Maud Muller" assumes the guise of inspiration to his suddenly excited brain. He has no time for formalities now; he makes his adieux hurriedly, to the manifest annoyance of Lady Annette; but his whispered praises of her *protégée*, Miss Lee, compensate in some measure for his abrupt departure. It is a favourite scheme of hers that Olympia should find favour in the eyes of her "pet" artist. The instinct of match-making is strong within her. Most good women possess it, and they who have no children of their own are all the more inclined to look after those of other people.

Percy meanwhile is driving towards Chelsea, oblivious alike of the reader and his gracious hostess; thinking wholly, and with growing interest, of that newly-suggested subject.

This very morning he had placed a fresh canvas upon the easel, with the vague intention of commencing some new work; but inspiration was wanting, and no sketch had been begun. Now,

while the impression upon his mind is perfectly clear, he will trace an outline in charcoal, and to-morrow morning he will set to work upon the sketch of what he hopes will be a grand picture some day.

With a good model—ah, that will be the greatest difficulty—a model who will inspire him; and where is such a one to be found? He passes the commonplace professionals in rapid dissatisfied review; then he thinks of the ladies of his acquaintance. Is there one among them who would answer to the ideal “Maud Muller” already clearly defined to his mental vision? There is a certain Miss Bolingbroke—she has the right tone of complexion and hair; but she is *grande dame*—would expect adulation, and consider the fact of her sitting a frightful bore and marvellous condescension. No; no good result could accrue thus. Far better the simple professional, who gladly poses for her hardly-earned five shillings a day, than a fine lady who comes with airs and graces, finds it impossible to retain the necessary position for ten consecutive minutes, and considers the vexed artist a perfect monster of cruelty if he presumes to expect unflagging attention. He must inquire—must look about for a model to suit him and his subject; then——

How bitterly cold is this piercing wind! how fast and thick the snowflakes are falling! The chill air actually penetrates the closed window of the hansom.

“Bah!” Percy springs to the ground, and stamps his feet. They are frozen. Russia, Siberia—can anything be colder than this? “Great heavens!” he exclaims, stopping short as he is about to place the latch-key in the lock of his studio-door, “what is this?” and he bends down, using his fingers where darkness has made sight useless. A woman is crouching on the doorstep—a woman asleep, faint, or—dead?

He lifts the stiff, frozen form in his arms. He will look at her by the blazing gas, which he lights as soon as he has laid her on the sofa in the studio.

Shall he leave her and run for a doctor? If she be dead, no doctor can help her, poor soul; and if she is only faint with cold, he can surely revive her. The stove is still alight, the room is warm; she is sure to recover her senses there. And as his worst fears leave him, he laughs at himself for his foolish anxieties. Ten to one she is an impostor, who has heard of his good-nature and presumed upon it. If that be so, he can give

her a shilling, and send her away with a curse. She will deserve the curse rather than the shilling, for she has given him quite a turn.

He has laid her down now, and with hasty, trembling hands he strikes a match, turns the gas on full, and, as its light falls upon her face, he looks upon it with amazed eyes.

She still lies white, unconscious, rigid; but she is beautiful.

No low ragged impostor this, but a lovely young girl. The artist and the man within him are both touched with infinite admiration, with sudden intense compassion. The perfect oval of her delicate face, the long dark lashes resting upon her cheeks, the waving masses of gold-brown hair. Oh, why are her eyes closed? When will she open them and look at him?

The great desire that she should do so recalls him to her necessities. He fills a glass with brandy. "That's better than medicine, as Uncle Gustave says," he mutters, and strives to pour some of the spirit between her pallid lips; but they are firmly closed, and the drops trickle down. He is enraged at this; it seems as though he were taking some advantage of her sweet unconsciousness. Ah, she is reviving! She utters a feeble sigh; the fingers

he is chafing move in his close grasp; her lips tremble, and she opens her eyes.

"Thank God!" cries Percy, with a fervour which astonishes himself. And as she turns her startled eyes shyly upon him: "This is my 'Maud Muller,'" he thinks.

The spirit of inspiration is strong upon him; he is so filled with the thought of his contemplated picture that he almost loses sight of the necessities of this poor, faint, frozen creature, who seems as if she had fallen upon his doorstep out of the snow-clouds above, in answer to his earnest desire for a model. She has raised herself now, and when he gives her some brandy-and-water and bids her drink, she does so obediently.

"You are hungry," he asserts.

She makes no attempt at denial.

He brings her some soup from his pantry, and quickly warms it over the stove.

She watches him in listless silence; she is slowly recovering; but she is not quite herself yet. She neither wonders where she is, nor how she came there; nor does the presence of this stranger distress her. She accepts what he gives her; she feels warm, comfortable, and at rest. Her reasoning faculties are not aroused yet; she has

vague sensations only; but such as they are, they are soothing and pleasant.

"You are very kind and very considerate," she says at last. It is the first time she has spoken. He has discreetly abstained from addressing her, anxious to give her ample time to recover herself. He turns towards her now. She has left the sofa, and is standing irresolute. She feels dazed still, the floor seems to move under her feet, and she covers her face with her hands to shut out the bewildering glare of light.

"I will turn the gas lower," he says, and suits the action to the words. "You are not quite strong yet, and the light is too much for you. Will you come and sit here by the fire?" he resumes presently. "That part of the room is always colder than this."

She crosses over and takes the chair he offers, which is near his own. He has opened the doors of the stove, and they both look into the clear red coke fire.

She is still too languid, and he is far too much interested to notice how long they keep silence; but suddenly Clare rouses herself with an effort, and says, in a faltering tone:

"I owe you some account of myself, and what

has brought me into this miserable plight. I will tell you some of the troubles I have had, and I think I can convince you that I am neither unworthy nor ungrateful."

He notices the painful hesitation of her utterance, though he is charmed to find that her speech and her accent are those of a lady.

"Pray don't try to talk if it tires you," he says gently. "I can wait until you feel stronger."

"But I must give you some account of myself, and at once," she says, determined to conquer a reluctance to speak, which she feels to be cowardly since he is so gentle, considerate, and kind. And then she continues without further hesitation. "I must ask you to give me some advice, and perhaps even some help for this one night."

"Believe that I am entirely at your service," he answers gallantly. Indeed, he feels tempted to kneel at her feet, and swear to be her faithful servant, humble, loyal, and true. But fortunately for both of them he conquers this wildly-chivalrous impulse, and contents himself by listening to all she tells him in silence, if not in patience. She states her facts briefly and clearly. She tells him that she is alone in London; that she ran away

from a situation on account of the injustice shown her by the lady of the house; and that this very day she has had to leave a temporary lodging in consequence of something which was very painful to her, and of which she begs he will excuse her speaking at greater length just now.

"Some ruffian has been persecuting this poor child," thinks Percy, who immediately puts his own interpretation on this brief outline of her story.

"I left my travelling-bag, my books, my work, all I had in the world, behind me," she says; "and at this moment I have not a penny in my pocket, nor do I know where to go for a night's shelter. I can work, and I have proved that I can earn my living if only the opportunity be given to me. You are a gentleman, and you have been good and kind to me. Will you trust me, and help me yet a little further? Words are empty idle things, I know; but indeed, sir, I can and will prove by my actions that what I have told you is all quite true, and that I have now no greater desire than to gain an honest livelihood, and to convince you that I am deserving of your help if you will give it me."

Percy's experience of London life and London

impostors has been large and varied; he might indeed, like Mrs. Foley, have declared it as very *expensive*. He has been lied to and cheated by women, models, and others, and he has learned to be doubtful of all professions, and habitually on his guard against strangers.

And yet he believes in this forlorn beautiful girl, who has neither money, friends, nor a home to shelter her, and whom he has found fainting upon his door-step. She is a lady in the true sense of the word; on that point he has no doubt. He honestly desires to help her. To put her more at her ease, he will at once let her know that, in the time to come, she will have it in her power to do him a great service, if she so chooses. At this suggestion of his she brightens visibly.

"And now I hope you will not object to my finding you a comfortable lodging for the night," he says. "To-morrow we will talk over the future together, and then I will ask you to do me a favour, and will also propose a way of earning money to you, which I think you will find acceptable. And now will you tell me your name?"

But he repents the question as soon as he has asked it; for he sees the look of pain and perplexity which comes into her face.

"May I call you Maud?" he cries eagerly. "I have a reason for asking you, as I can never think of you by any other name."

"Yes; Maud Smith, if you please," she answers, with a smile that he thinks bewitching; and then, afraid that she may see the admiration she inspires in his ardent eyes, he turns hastily away, takes up his hat, and asks her if she is ready to go with him and find a lodging.

"Let me wrap this plaid around you," he says, seizing a light travelling-rug and folding it about her shoulders. "It is still bitterly cold."

He has to battle with a rising temptation to clasp her in his arms, as he wraps the shawl about her supple figure; but the facts of her innocence, of her being his guest, and, to some extent, in his power, restrain him, and give him strength and courage to resist. He is no coward; and to take advantage of a woman's helplessness in any sense, is cowardly. Therefore he endeavours to steel his heart against her fascinating influence, and they walk briskly forth together over the crisp white snow. It is freezing still, but Clare no longer feels the cold. Her heart is comforted, her starving body has been warmed and fed, and her troubled spirit is at rest; for she feels she

has found a stanch friend in this stranger, although she has just heard his name for the first time. Her great comfort lies in the fact of his assurance that she, in her turn, will be able to do him some service, and that he will find her some work.

They enter a small house presently, the landlady of which opens the door in person. She is a tidy elderly woman, and receives Mr. Hetheringham with some surprise, but with evident pleasure.

"I want you to find a bedroom for this young lady, who is a friend of ours," says Percy, leading the way into the neat little parlour, the door of which he holds ceremoniously open for "Miss Smith," whom he now introduces to "Mrs. Andrew" by that name.

"And the young lady's luggage, sir?" asks Mrs. Andrew.

"Ay, there's the rub," says Percy, with a fine tragedy manner. "The fact is, Miss Smith has only just arrived in town, and her luggage was either not put into the train, or taken out at Clapham Junction; at all events, it did not come with her. So we shall have to make a considerable call on the resources of your establishment,

Mrs. Andrew; but as you are a wonderful woman, wonders may fairly be expected of you, and I shall rely upon your giving Miss Smith every possible assistance." He has dropped the bantering tone, and speaks with considerable gravity.

"You may rely on my doing the best I can, sir, for any friend of yours," says Mrs. Andrew readily; "but I fear my poor place is hardly fit for a lady."

"Indeed, I shall be most grateful if you can only manage to give me a bed," says Clare, stepping forward, and meeting the old lady's blinking eyes with a bright smile in her own. "The prospect of rest and quiet is delightful to me, I assure you; for I am a stranger in London, and travellers without luggage are mostly unwelcome lodgers."

"I'm sure, ma'am, I'm very sorry for your loss," says Mrs. Andrew kindly; "and now, if you please, I'll show you to your room, and I'll just set a light to the fire there. We shall manage till morning, never fear."

"Good-night, and many thanks," says Clare, holding her hand out to Percy.

As he takes it, he deftly slips two sovereigns into her soft palm.

"I shall come round early in the morning to see how you are getting on," he says hurriedly; and before she has had time to reply or remonstrate, he has gone.

Clare does not forget to kneel by the side of her bed to-night, and, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, she commits herself to the care of Him who tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb, and has guided her footsteps so far in safety and peace.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE STUDIO.

I ask no more from mortals
Than your beautiful face implies;
That beauty the artist, beholding,
Interprets and sanctifies.

MRS. ANDREW, in whose modest home Clare had found so welcome and convenient a shelter, had been Monsieur Bacchelier's housekeeper during Percy's childhood, when the merry schoolboy spent many happy holidays in the family mansion on Brixton Rise. Mrs. Andrew reigned supreme over the domestic part of that old-fashioned establishment, and her admiration for "Master Percy" dated back close on twenty years now. The old lady, in her long career of confidential servant to the crotchety bachelor (Percy's uncle), had acquired two virtues—rare among her sex and class—she was silent and discreet.

That there was some mystery about this remarkably handsome young lady who came to her house on foot with the gay young artist, who had no luggage and yet was introduced as a friend of

"ours," Mrs. Andrew felt assured; but her experience had taught her that it answered "best in the end" to accept facts as they were stated to her, and not to allow herself the privilege of question or comment so dear to the feminine mind.

This passive acquiescence had always saved much trouble and discussion to others and herself. Time would surely throw some light on what was now an enigma; time had solved all other mysteries for her in due course, and her patient silence had eventually been rewarded by enlightenment. She had left the impatience of youth behind her long ago, and could afford to wait.

There was some mystery about Miss Smith's advent in London, but there could be no possible doubt about the young lady herself. On that point Mrs. Andrew was thoroughly satisfied when she had had an interview with her lodger the morning after her arrival. Mrs. Andrew kept no servant; she waited upon her lodgers—of whom she could accommodate three—herself. Before Miss Smith could accomplish her toilet, it was necessary that certain purchases should be made for her. Mrs. Andrew volunteered to go out herself, and received ten shillings to spend, and ten

more in prepayment of a week's rent of the little bedroom in which Clare had spent the night most comfortably. This ready-money transaction satisfied the old lady as to her lodger's solvency—a very important item in that creed of respectability, which she held with all the tenacity of a frugal-minded woman who has put by a “pretty penny” in her time.

Clare, thankful to have found so convenient and economical a lodging, and so obliging a landlady, was most anxious to secure this little room for herself; but she was equally determined not to be received under false colours.

“I am very poor, I must tell you, Mrs. Andrew,” she avowed, without any hesitation; “and there is little chance of my ever regaining the luggage I have left behind; but work has been promised me, and I can work well. To prove this to you, I shall begin this morning to make some new covers for the toilet-table and the armchair in my bedroom. When they are finished I will present them to you.”

The materials Clare required were purchased for her by Mrs. Andrew; and that good old soul, whose little house was the joy and pride of her life, was delighted to see Miss Smith settle to her

self-imposed task with the skill of a rapid and experienced worker.

At eleven o'clock Mr. Hetheringham called, and Miss Smith was asked to step down to the parlour, the tenant of which (a City man) was absent as usual.

"Will you come round to my studio with me?" asks Percy, noting with exceeding satisfaction the lovely flush of restored health on his new acquaintance's blooming face. The remembrance of last night's cold pallor and deathlike rigidity vanishes like the thought of a horrid nightmare in the presence of this fresh radiant beauty. "We can talk at our leisure there."

"And have you really thought of something I can do for you?" says Clare, as she enters the studio.

What a wonderful place it is! Last night it appeared vast, gloomy, and uncanny, by reason of its enormous size and the partial light thrown by the stove and gas-lamps, which left the peaked oak roof with its cross beams and all the distant corners in mysterious darkness. But this morning the light, shining through a north window which occupies half the farther wall, lets sunshine into every nook; and Clare wonders and admires.

There was an artist in Torchester, a friend of her dear old master's, who gave drawing-lessons at the college, and who, for that kind master's sake, taught his little *protégée* to handle a pencil and dabble in water-colours in futile childish fashion. That "artist" called his little back-parlour a studio; and Clare's visits there afforded her the only glimpse she ever had into the vast art-world, the disciples of which are as numerous and varied as their habitations.

The lingering smell of tobacco-smoke; the easel, palette, and mahl-stick; the canvases; the tables littered with scraps and sketches—all these were familiar to Clare; but the luxury of this vast atelier, with its Persian rugs, stamped-leather chairs, and velvet sofa, was as different from the cramped poverty of poor little Mr. Bishop's study in Torchester, as was that humble artist himself in his threadbare jacket, smoking a short clay pipe, from the polished gentleman who now appears before her in his picturesque velvet coat, wearing embroidered slippers, and holding a meerschaum pipe in his hand, the bowl of which is fashioned in the likeness of a mermaid, with clear-cut profile and flowing hair.

"Do you mind my lighting my pipe, Miss

Maud?" asks Percy; and adds pleadingly, "Pray permit me to smoke; for I want you to give me the pleasure of your company for an hour or two this morning; and, if you don't object, I thought I might go on with my work at the easel, while you sit in this chair by the fire. But if I must not smoke, I fear my pretty plans will fall to the ground; for I should come to a standstill without my pipe. The influence of tobacco soothes, while it inspires; and we men are such slaves to our—vices."

"Don't use such a hard word, Mr. Hetheringham," says Clare, laughing. "For my part, I don't consider smoking a bad habit even; for my poor father, who is dead, smoked every evening, and taught me to fill and light his pipe for him. He said he could always blow the day's clouds away in his tobacco-smoke; so I got to like the smell of it."

"Wise man," says Percy, with a sigh of relief, and lights up on the instant.

He evidently expects his visitor to settle down in pleasant companionship with him; and the prospect of remaining in this delightfully suggestive work-room is very tempting to Clare, who

has the instincts of an artist, and whose natural inclination certainly is towards Bohemianism.

"May I sit by the fire and work, while you are painting?" she says, falling into his easy colloquial mood without the slightest affectation, and with a perfect absence of that *mauvaise honte* which painfully characterises underbred "misses."

"Nothing could be more delightful!" he says gaily. "I have no model coming to-day; so my work to some extent is mechanical, and therefore uninteresting. If you can make yourself comfortable here, and will talk to me a little, you will do me a signal favour, and considerably lighten the burden of the day's labour."

What woman worthy the name could resist so deftly-framed an appeal to her kindness?

Certainly not Clare. There is a subtle flattery in the fact of a man's humbly asking for the aid and comfort of companionship, which appeals irresistibly to the female heart. So Clare, delighted at the notion that her presence may assist the artist in his labours, settles comfortably by his fireside, occupying her hands with her newly-commenced work, and quite ready to talk or listen, as the busy man may deem desirable.

He talks with animation, amusing her and

himself by the recital of the vicissitudes of his artistic career. He tells her how many times he has been "hung" at the Academy, and explains the *modus operandi* of that illustrious institution. He ridicules some of the "old fogeys," speaks in terms of praise of others, and has plenty to say of the rising artists of the day; but though he talks so glibly, he is not idle; indeed, he handles his pencil with surprising diligence. He is making a sketch preparatory to putting it on the wood; it is the first outline on paper of a full-page illustration for *The Easel*, a magazine to which Hetheringham is a regular contributor.

Clare, from her coign of vantage near the stove, glances across now and then, and eagerly notes the progress he is making. But she is too far away to distinguish the subject clearly; and by-and-by her interest so completely masters her shyness that she leaves her chair, goes over to the artist's side, and takes up her position there.

He appears not to notice her vicinity; but, in truth, it delights him, and, as she watches, he explains what he is doing.

"It is so wonderful and so interesting," she says, "to see the point of your pencil and those

single lines creating all that form, and telling quite a pathetic story."

"Ah now, I have come to a standstill," he says, as he pauses to cut the pencil, which has broken over a heavy line.

"Do let me cut it for you," says Clare; "I can manage that." She takes up his penknife and points half a dozen well-worn pencils lying on a table at his side.

"You are as considerate as you are clever," he says, when he sees what she has accomplished; "but now I have come to a worse difficulty than a broken pencil, and I hardly dare ask you to help me this time."

"Oh, if there is anything I can do, please tell me," she exclaims eagerly. "I am so glad to be useful, and—I have been trying to make myself so all my life; that is my vocation, you know."

How charming she is! How prettily she speaks! How well she chooses her words! He must steel his heart, which is beating with undue emotion again; and he certainly must forbear to meet those earnest beautiful eyes of hers, which have haunted him ever since he looked into them last night.

If he can contrive to concentrate his attention

on his work, he will conquer this mad desire to tell her that he thinks her the most fascinating of women; if not—ah, he would indeed be a fool to run the risk of offending her now—her, whom fortune sent in answer to his fervent prayers—this ideal “Maud Muller.”

“My difficulty just now,” he resumes in a very matter-of-fact tone, “is the necessity of a bit of nature here. To get the folds of this woman’s dress, who is kneeling in the foreground of my sketch, I must see them. There are effects which one’s unaided imagination cannot supply; among these, drapery is the most harassing. Would you—could you help me by kneeling on that cushion for a few minutes, and lifting your arms and hands—thus? She is entreating for pardon. I don’t know the story; but that is the situation. A ‘forbidding-looking man’ is to lean against this tree to the right: those are my instructions. Will you pose for me?”

“I can certainly try,” says Clare laughingly; and in a moment she has assumed the attitude he suggests. Her dress falls in picturesque folds about her; her hands and her face are lifted in entreaty. She poses gracefully and steadily.

“Thank you ten thousand times,” says Percy,

rising and coming to her assistance as she tries to get up; but her limbs are cramped and aching.

"You posed so admirably," says he, with contrition, "that I have quite forgotten the length of time I have kept you in one position; and now I have tired you. What a brute I am!"

"Nonsense," she says, laughing; "you are far too apt to overrate your shortcomings. This stiffness will be over as soon as I have walked about a bit; and if I really have been of some little use to you, I shall be delighted."

"You have posed so exceedingly well," says he, "that I shall at once summon up courage to make that suggestion you asked me about."

"You will tell me how I can serve you, and—also—how I can earn some money?" she asks, her face flushing, her eyes shining.

Percy turns away from her, and begins to pace the room with agitated steps.

"Think of your picture," he says to himself, "and forget this bewitchingly lovely and lovable woman."

"Did you ever meet with a poem called 'Maud Muller?'" he asks, but takes care not to look at her while he speaks.

She has read the poem. It was in a collec-

tion of American authors which a dear old friend once lent her.

He asks no question—he has resolutely determined not to do so; but he feels an odd relief as she says an *old* friend.

Friend alone, unqualified, would have suggested a lover, perhaps the man who gave her that objectionable ring, with its obtrusive “For ever,” the only article of jewellery she wears, and on the finger girls are wont to reserve for the wedding-ring. He continues to pace to and fro, but he is quieter now. Her presence, and the steady stitch-stitch of her needle, have a tranquillising effect upon him. He tells her that he heard the poem read yesterday, and that he thinks her a suitable model for his picture—his principal picture—for the Academy next year.

“If you can make up your mind to pose for me regularly, I can give you half-a-guinea a-day,” he says, striving to be as business-like as though he were speaking to the most ordinary of his models. “It is by no means easy work, remember,” he adds deprecatingly. “However much I may try to spare you, even if I make you rest between whiles, your limbs will ache, you will feel cramped and weary, and, perhaps, hate me for ever having

suggested what, to amateurs, seems torture, and to the most hardened professional must always be more or less trying and difficult."

"If one's heart is in one's work, nothing can seem very hard," she says earnestly; "and I cannot imagine an easier or a pleasanter way of earning so much money."

He has paused in his hurried walk, and is standing in front of her now. She rises and holds her hand out to him.

"I cannot thank you in words for all you are doing for me," she says, her beautiful eyes filling with sudden irrepressible tears; "but I think I can prove my gratitude and my desire to serve you by the unflagging attention I will give you as your much-honoured model."

He has taken her hand eagerly as she offered it, and holds it closely with a lingering pressure. He seems disinclined to relinquish his hold too, which makes it irksome to her; then she withdraws it.

"I have not been quite idle, you see," she says, trying to ignore the embarrassment they both feel, as she shows him a strip of holland on which a chain of daisies is beginning to bloom in wool of natural colours. Her woman's wit has

warned her of danger, and she is quick to avert it by this laughing allusion to her flower-patterned broidery. She blames herself for having been too demonstrative in the exhibition of her sudden but heartfelt gratitude; and she wisely determines not to be led away by her emotions again. That lingering pressure of his fingers on hers has taught her a wholesome and a necessary lesson.

His quick sensitive nature divines her thoughts, and he bitterly reproaches himself for the trouble he has caused her. If he allows his feelings to betray themselves thus, she will decline to sit to him at all. And what would become of "Maud Muller" then?

"May I take it for granted that you will come to me here every morning?" he says after a long and somewhat awkward pause, in which they have both resolved on their future course. He assumes that highly matter-of-fact air again, and she, much relieved, responds in a businesslike tone.

"Name your own time," she says, "and I will be punctual. I should prefer to begin my sittings soon; for I cannot feel like a free agent until I have repaid you the money you kindly lent me last night."

"Proud as Lucifer. Shall I succeed in taming

her?" he thinks, puzzled. He has known many women in his time, but never one quite like this. Where did she spring from? What can her history be? She is a lady; she has been well educated; she has read; and she has thought for herself too. How is it he found her in such a deplorable plight? Who and where are her friends? She surely cannot stand alone in the world?

Well, perhaps it is no business of his, but it is really perplexing. Will the time come when she will trust and confide in him?

It seems as though she guesses his thoughts; for she says:

"I hardly know what or how much of my trouble I told you last night, Mr. Hetheringham; but this morning I have the courage to ask you a favour. *Trust* me; my life has been an unhappy but a very simple one. There is no mystery, and little enough romance, in it; but circumstances have rendered it absolutely necessary that I should remain in hiding for some time to come. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of" (how proud and defiant she looks as she makes this declaration!); "it is from others I am flying, not from the consequences of my own acts; those I

shall always have the courage to meet face to face, I hope. Will you, can you, believe this?"

Her inclination, as she uttered the last words, was to appeal to him; but she remembers the failure of a previous demonstration on her part, checks herself, and asks her final question coldly, quietly—more like a disinterested lawyer than an impassioned woman.

Percy takes his cue from her. He meets her honest eyes with that unfaltering gaze of his that has such a power of concentration in it.

"No one could look at you and doubt your truth," he says, with conviction. And all the time he is thinking: "How shall I ever do justice to her glorious colour? How can I render that wonderful complexion? What brush could interpret the varying brilliancy of her beautiful eyes?"

Fortunately for him, his thoughts have wandered from the sentimental to the practical aspect of admiration.

With the desire to paint her beauty as it appears to him, the difficulties likely to occur in the task present themselves, and he has almost forgotten her question, and his answer when she speaks again.

"That is well," she says. "I will attempt no

further protestation. Time must prove my friend in this instance, and time will show you that you were right to believe in and trust me as you do. You think I ought to be quite satisfied now?" she adds after a little thought; "but I have still a favour to ask you; it is the favour of absolute silence where I am concerned."

His eyes demand an explanation.

"I want you, I must ask you," she says, "to give me your word of honour that you will not tell anyone about me, about your new model. And you must not let anyone see the picture you are painting, if it really is to be like me, that is."

"But it is to be my great picture; it is going into the Academy!" he cries, in evident dismay.

"Ah, but that will not be until next year," she says; "and by that time I can—I shall—oh, everyone will have forgotten me, no doubt." She stammers, and is more confused than he has seen her as yet. Many thoughts have flitted through her brain. Before next May, Lord Verstrume will surely have ceased to trouble himself about her at all; and if Harold should have returned, who knows but that very picture may give him some clue to her whereabouts, and, if he wishes, he can find her then.

"I certainly do not intend to interfere with any plans you have made for yourself and the future, Mr. Hetheringham," she says. "All I would venture to ask of you is silence and secrecy for the present."

"I will swear to be discretion personified," he declares; and she, looking anxiously into his face, sees he is serious.

"That being settled, I think I will go home," she says; "for I am hungry, and Mrs. Andrew told me her dinner would always be ready at two o'clock."

"Won't you stay and have some luncheon with me?" he asks. "My good mother, who is a French-woman, always keeps my larder well supplied with *bouillon* and *pâtés* and things. I think you enjoyed the soup last night?"

"I did, indeed," she says, smiling; "but I would prefer to go home now. As I shall hope to remain with Mrs. Andrew for some time, I must try and replace some of the necessaries I have lost."

"You will want money," he says, taking some gold out of his purse and offering it to her.

"When I have paid my debt to you, and earned more, I shall be glad to take it," she says.

"For the present I have all I want. At what time shall I come in the morning?"

"Will ten o'clock be too early for you?" he asks, much troubled to find he is to lose her now, and yet not daring to tell her how much he wishes her to remain.

She has put on the little serge hat that matches her dress. "Good-morning," she says; "I will be quite punctual to-morrow." She does not offer him her hand; but is gone, and walking briskly away along the narrow passage that leads past Mrs. Spruce's shop and into the road, before he quite realises that she has left him, and that a terrible blank has fallen upon his prospects for the day.

If she had remained, he could have gone on with that troublesome sketch of his, and then he would have put it on the block to-morrow, as the folks at *The Easel* expect him to do; but—she has gone! The salt has lost its savour, the notion of work has become distasteful. He longs for to-morrow; then she will be here again, a fresh canvas set up, inspiration cannot be wanting, and the new work will be begun with wondrous vigour and zeal.

Oh for to-morrow!

Meanwhile the air of the studio seems oppressive; to stay there would be impossible now. He will go out to luncheon.

Lady Annette is always glad to see him. And so she proves herself now, when he is unexpectedly announced.

"You are doubly welcome to-day, you traitor," she says, with a threatening movement of her slim white hand, "because Olly Lee is spending the day with me, and I particularly wish you to know and admire my *protégée* as much as I do. If you make yourself very amiable, we may even forgive you for running away in that rude fashion yesterday."

"I must offer you my fervent congratulations, my humble and hearty thanks, Miss Lee, for your exquisite rendering of a most suggestive poem," says Percy, in his best manner, when Olly enters the room. Her velvet gown is exchanged for a simple cashmere robe, in which she looks more diminutive than ever.

"I guess you were inspired to run away pretty quick all the same," she says, laughing, and arching her black brows ominously.

"I was indeed inspired," he says very gravely.

"And the time may come when you will acknowledge the fact."

"Oh my! ain't he serious!" she exclaims.

Her everyday speech is decidedly more *prononcé* than her reading; but she is so quaint, so childlike and *petite* in every sense, that Percy, with all his fastidiousness, does not object to her Americanism. On the contrary, the novelty of it seems piquant to him.

"After luncheon, I shall entreat you to talk to me about 'Maud Muller,'" he says; "to tell me all the poem suggests to you, who have thought much about it; to repeat some of the most telling lines, and to give me your opinion of what the heroine with the rake should be like, suppose one meant to paint her picture. Will you forgive me, a stranger, for desiring to trespass thus on your good-nature?"

Miss Lee glances at Lady Annette.

"Lady Annette will give us leave to chat awhile, I am sure," says Percy, with his pleasant boyish smile; "indeed I have little doubt we shall have her kind assistance at our artistic confab."

"That you shall," says her ladyship cordially; "for I can see that you mean to do something this time, Master Percy. You have been lazy

too long. If you have been inspired at last, it will be a godsend to many of us."

Other visitors are announced at this moment, and Lady Annette has only time to whisper these oracular words to Percy as he is about to follow Miss Lee into the library, while their hostess goes to meet her other guests in the drawing-room:

"Courage, *mon ami!* Faint heart never won lady fair or dark."

* * * * *

Long after the artist and all the other visitors have taken their leave, the luncheon, the poem, and its subsequent discussion being well-nigh forgotten, Lady Annette takes Olly's small face in her hands, imprints a kiss upon the delicate lips, and says:

"You have inspired a painter, my child, and you have made a conquest."

"He is most charming, I will declare," says Olly, "and when he and I had that good time in the library, talking of all things round, I guess I liked him very well indeed; but up to this present I take it he is thinking far more of the great picture he means to paint than of any living woman."

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